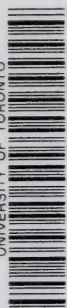


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JESUS AND NICODEMUS

JESUS AND NICODEMUS

A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

BY THE

REV. JOHN REID, M.A.

INVERNESS

"I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE: NO MAN COMETH
UNTO THE FATHER, BUT BY ME"—JOHN XIV.

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TO
THE CONGREGATIONS
OF
MILNATHORT; TAY SQUARE, DUNDEE
AND
NESS BANK, INVERNESS
AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS IN THE MINISTRY
OF THE GOSPEL

PREFACE

THE fact that the narrative of the interview between our Lord and Nicodemus is a distinct section of the Gospel according to John, naturally suggests that it should be made a subject of separate study. It is also a passage of such importance, that no apology is required for an endeavour to set forth afresh the great truths and lessons which it contains.

But however earnestly the student may labour, the result of his toil creates within him a feeling of inadequacy, and strengthens the conviction that in the words of Jesus there is an inexhaustible fulness.

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J. R.

INVERNESS, *October* 1906.



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I

THE TIME: ITS PASSIONS
AND HOPES

“The Night is far spent, and the Day is at hand.”

“The Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, . . . and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

CHAPTER I

THE TIME: ITS PASSIONS AND HOPES

It was Passover time in Jerusalem. The Holy City was crowded with pilgrims. "Jews out of every nation under heaven," as well as from Galilee and Judæa, had come up to the Feast, the great Sacrament of the race. They had sung the Pilgrim Psalms by the way, and rejoiced with great joy when their feet stood within the city gates. An eager hospitality welcomed them. Every house was filled with guests. Housetops and gardens, the vineyards and the slopes of the "mountains that stand around Jerusalem," were covered with booths and tents, under which the pilgrims, for whom there was no room in the city, found a temporary but sufficient shelter.

It was the time of the Great Fair as well as of the Great Feast. The bazaars were filled from end to end with stalls, which even overflowed into the Temple courts, where eager merchants and wary buyers bargained with all

the cunning and leisure of the East. Pilgrim and priest, Pharisee and Sadducee, Zealot and publican, jostled each other in the narrow ways. All the languages of the Dispersion floated on the dusty air. Josephus says that at one Passover it was estimated that there were 2,700,000¹ people in and around the city. Mecca in the days of the "Haj," or Benares at the times of special festival, show the animated scenes which crowded and coloured the streets and courts of Jerusalem during the Passover. The Temple, with its white marble walls and golden dome, was the maelstrom of the city's agitated life. All that was best and worst in Israel was congregated there. Its courts were thronged from early morning with worshippers and traffickers. There, the hurried, tumultuous heart-beat of the city could be heard most distinctly. From the Tower Antonia near by, the Roman soldiers, alert and ready, looked down on the seething crowds. Memory, hope, and patriotic passion were moving the hearts of the people, as the waves of the sea are moved by the winds. A nation with a history like that of the Jews could not rest tranquil and content under the yoke of Rome. The domination of the "uncircumcised" Gentile was a bitter

¹ *Bell. Jud.* vi. 9. 3.

insult to their pride. As God's "elect race" they looked upon their conquerors with contempt and hatred. Elsewhere in the world the Roman eagles found little permanent resistance to their power. The subject races accepted with little or no objection the laws, arts, and customs of their masters. But before the turbulent and intensely national spirit of the Jews, the genius of Rome found itself strangely at fault. Peace was maintained solely by the pressure of the iron hand of irresistible physical might. Special privileges were bestowed upon them, such as were granted to no other of the subject races, but all without avail. The deep-seated patriotism and passionate love of liberty which characterised them were unsubdued. Now, in the bitterness of their servitude they had begun to dream of "a Man," "a Son of David," a "Deliverer," a "Messiah." In the disappointment and hardness of their lot, they fed their imaginations with the old and stirring prophecies of a Golden Age, which was to be inaugurated with the establishment of a Kingdom of God. "The Kingdom of God" was the political and religious watchword of the day. It was a political rather than a religious watchword. To the Jewish patriot—and what Jew was not a patriot, ready to cry, "If I forget thee, O

Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning"—it was a cry of liberty. It meant that the Romans were to be expelled; taxes were to be abolished; power was to be in the hands of the children of Abraham. A Messianic Prince was to reign with Solomonic splendour in Jerusalem; prosperity was to come again; Paradise was to be restored—"Every man was to sit under his vine and fig tree, none daring to make him afraid." In the minds of some, especially of the learned, the expectation centred on the coming of a great "Prophet like unto Moses," through whom the desired deliverance was to be wrought. To the Jews the prophets were more than teachers, they were also statesmen, almost dictators.¹ Despised and rejected while they lived, the later generations rebuilt their tombs, and regarded them as the messengers of God. The words of the prophetic record were "as a light shining in a dark place until the day dawned and the Day-star arose in their hearts." It was their profound belief that "the scripture could not be broken," that "God could not deny Himself." The promised kingdom was certain—though it tarried, they waited for it with eager and confident hearts.

A new feeling of expectancy had lately been

¹ *Ecce Homo*, pp. 20, 250.

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born among them. After centuries of silence, the voice of a prophet was once more heard—a prophet who in dress and manner recalled to them the “spirit and power of Elias,” whose reappearance was expected as the sign that the Messiah King was near.

The strong cry of John the Baptist had rung through the land like the blast of a trumpet, declaring that the long-looked-for deliverance of God was at hand. “All men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not,” and while they “mused the fire burned.” The rulers sent to ask him the question on which all were musing: “Art thou the Christ?” But while he answered, “No, I am not the Christ,” or “the Prophet,” he intensified the spirit of expectation by declaring that he was His forerunner, preparing His way, announcing His approach. These things were in the minds of the pilgrims as they thronged the streets and courts, the synagogues and the Temple. The city was a throbbing volcano. There was passion in the place, ready to burst forth at a touch. All felt that they were on the verge of a great event.

Just then the city was startled by a bold act of Jesus of Nazareth. In greed of gain, the rulers of the Temple had allowed its courts to be used as places of merchandise for

the convenience of the worshippers. Possibly it was only the court of the Gentiles which had been so degraded, and if so, the arrangement was dictated by contempt for the Gentiles as well as by greed. In righteous indignation, Jesus had made a whip of small cords, and swept the Temple clear of the eager hucksterers who had made it "a den of thieves." It was an assertion of prophetic authority in an act more impressive than words. The "whip of small cords" was the symbol of a spiritual and moral authority which was irresistible. Its significance was unmistakable. The deed was approved by every truly pious Jew. It evoked a thrill of admiring sympathy in many hearts. Some may even have whispered that "this was the Messiah," that "the Baptist had pointed to Him, saying, 'This is He of whom I spake.'" The rulers questioned Him, saying, "What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" They sought to know what right He had to interfere with arrangements which they had permitted or sanctioned. They demanded some proof of authority to justify an act of righteousness, not recognising that it was its own witness. As well might they ask the sun why it shone, or the thunder why it pealed. The work itself was sign enough to those who had

eyes to see its meaning. The reply of Jesus was mysterious. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." That saying staggered the people. It arrested the movement of devotion which was ready to throw itself at His feet. It checked the cry of acclamation that trembled on their lips. But from that moment Jesus became a marked man in the city. It was recognised that a new force had arrived. Many declared that they "believed" in Him. But He was not carried away by their enthusiasm; the popular excitement did not mislead Him. Though they "believed in His name," He did not "believe" them.¹ It was the wonder of His works which drew them to Him, not a conviction of the spiritual truth of His words and mission. They were overcome by the surprise of His miracles, not by the force and truth of His teaching.

So great was the impression produced by what He did and said, that the leaders of the different parties in Jerusalem seem to have felt that He was one who had to be reckoned with as a possible opponent or helper. His words and movements were anxiously scrutinised and discussed. He may have been approached by the followers of Shammai or

¹ Note A.

of Hillel, by representatives of the Zealots or other parties in the State, whose jealousy of each other was only less strong than their common hatred of the Romans. Each was eager to win a new recruit, to exploit him or patronise him for their own advantage. But He kept Himself aloof from them all. It was followers that He wanted, not leaders; men who would trust Him, not men whom He would have to trust. That seems the most probable interpretation of the words, "But Jesus did not commit Himself to them."¹ These political factions and religious parties were not to be His instruments, and He was too wise to be their tool. Looking back across many years, the Beloved Disciple marks the strange wisdom of His Master in those early days. He would not be entangled in their schemes. The Evangelist sets down the reasons for what may then have appeared to him an unwise decision. "He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man."² It was not necessary that any representative of the various parties should tell Him of their views, aims, and motives, or warn Him of the danger of giving heed to what others might say. He did not need to be warned, for He knew

¹ Note A.² Note B.

already, knew instinctively. He had the faculty of reading men; He "saw" the true character and secret bias of the souls of those with whom He came into contact. There were signs and tokens, hidden from others, but visible to Him, whose significance He could interpret. It was the power of "the seer" which He exercised, and in Him it was complete. It made Him "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart," and discovered to Him the secrets of the lives of men and women. We see Him guiding Himself by this marvellous insight, in the choice of the disciples, in the various conflicts with the Pharisees, in the different methods He employed in dealing with individuals. There is scarcely an incident in the whole course of His ministry which does not illustrate the truth of the claim that He knew what was in man. He always acted and spoke in accordance with such knowledge. So, to the many in Jerusalem who at that time professed to believe in Him, He did not trust Himself, recognising as He did the facile and fugitive character of their faith, but He revealed Himself to others in whom He saw the qualities which deserved His confidence. He treated each according to His perception of what they actually were.

A general habit of restraint characterised His ministry in Jerusalem. He withheld Himself from the impulsive and unthinking enthusiasm of the mob. But Nicodemus is presented as one to whom He acted in another way. The treatment which he received was an exception¹ to the rule. Jesus did trust Himself to him, opening out His mind in his hearing, without the reserve which He had found to be necessary in dealing with others. Even though Nicodemus may have come to Jesus as a representative of some who believed in Him with an imperfect and unreliable faith, the Saviour saw that he was one who could be treated differently, and to whom He could unfold the inner character of His mission. It was with the man that Jesus dealt, not with the party whom he may have represented. Ignorant he might be, surprisingly ignorant, but there was an element of sincerity in his character which made instruction possible. How Jesus trusted Himself to Nicodemus we see in the record of the conversation which is set down in the third chapter of the Gospel.

¹ Note C.

II
COMING BY NIGHT

"All things seek for rest :
A home above, a home beneath the sod.
The sun will seek the west,
The bird will seek its nest,
The heart another breast
Whereon to lean ; the spirit seeks its God."
DORA GREENWELL, *Carmina Crucis*.

"God's silent, searching flight ;
When my Lord's head is filled with dew, and all
His locks are wet with the clear drops of night ;
His still, soft call ;
His knocking time : the soul's dumb watch,
When spirits their fair kindred catch."
HENRY VAUGHAN, *The Night*.

CHAPTER II

COMING BY NIGHT

It was on one of the nights of the Passover week that Nicodemus sought an interview with Jesus. The place of meeting is unknown. Henry Vaughan, the Silurist, asks—

“O who will tell me where
He found Thee in that dead and silent hour!
What hallow'd, solitary ground did bear
 So rare a flower;
Within whose sacred leaves did lie
The fulness of the Deity!

No mercy-seat of gold,
No dead and dusty cherub, nor carv'd stone,
But His own living works, did my Lord hold
 And lodge alone;
When trees and herbs did watch and peep
And wonder, while the Jews did sleep.”¹

It may have been in some house in the city, or in Bethany, where Jesus and His few disciples had been welcomed as Paschal guests. But at later times, we know that during the

¹ *The Night.*

Passover season, Jesus found His nightly resting-place on the Mount of Olives (John 8^{1,2}; Matt. 24³), and the custom may date from the beginning of His ministry.¹ Most likely it was in a house on the favoured mount, or under a booth in the garden at the foot of it, over the brook Kedron, the Garden of Gethsemane, "where Jesus ofttimes resorted with His disciples" (John 18²). To this secluded spot an inquirer like Nicodemus might find his way with self-respect and yet with secrecy. Within the shelter of the booth, or under the shadows of the olive trees that shimmered in the moonlight, he could find the opportunity of private speech with Jesus, undisturbed by the thought that he was "seen of men."

Nicodemus "was a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews." That describes his religious and social position. As a Pharisee he belonged to the strictest, most orthodox and popular of the religious parties of the time. The Pharisees boasted of their knowledge of the Law, and of the "hedge" which they had built around it; they made professions of superior sanctity, and maintained in their extreme forms the claims of Jewish privilege and separateness. Originally they were the

¹ Ramsay, *The Education of Christ*.

Puritans of Israel—stern, conscientious, and sincere—but in the course of time “the salt had lost its savour.” As a party they had become artificial, sanctimonious, and corrupt. The correct observance of ritual, and not rightness of heart and life, had become the essential thing with them. They “practised falsehood under saintly show.” Politically, they were the democratic party in the State, whose policy was summed up in the popular phrase, “the Kingdom of God.” The great majority of the patriots of the nation adhered to them. There were amongst them men of true religious life and honourable mind, but in the mass they were hypocritical and self-seeking. Then, as at later times, “patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel.” Many who required a cloak for their evil lives sheltered themselves within the party. With most of the Pharisees religion and morality were dissociated. As amongst the Brahmins of India, “the greatest saint” was often “the greatest sinner.” The denunciations of their hypocrisy which thunder through the Gospels were not undeserved. Even in the Talmud, the Pharisees are divided into seven classes,¹ of which only one served God from love. We believe that Nicodemus was one of these last—ignorant but sincere,

¹ Note D.

religious but not hypocritical, steadfast in his faith but not satisfied with it. He came out of "the night" to talk with Jesus. He may be regarded as a representative of the good which yet remained in Israel.

As "a ruler of the Jews" he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the great court of the nation. In dignity it was like a conclave of cardinals. Its seventy (or seventy-one) members, as far as the Roman power permitted, were the judges and rulers of Israel, whose authority extended over Jews wherever they were found. Their influence, if not their authority, was practically absolute over the whole body of the people. Nicodemus was also a teacher, or "the teacher" of Israel (John 3¹⁰), a title which has been interpreted as indicating that he was one of the three chief officers of the Sanhedrin. These were the President, the Vice-President, and the "Master" or "wise man."¹ It is this last with whom he has been identified, and part of his duties, it is said, was to superintend the schools which were in Jerusalem. Most likely he was also a man of wealth, and had all the reverence that goes with age. Tradition says little about him which is valuable or reliable.

It was this man of position and influence

¹ MacIntyre, *The Fourth Gospel*.

² Note D.

who came to Jesus "by night." John is too suggestive a writer to use the words simply to mark the time of the visit. In his employment of the phrase he seems to indicate that there was a certain element of secrecy, or at least of privacy, in the visit. There may have been indications of hostility or dislike towards Jesus, even at that early time, among those with whom Nicodemus was associated, which he would not have been justified in disregarding, in view of his imperfect acquaintance with Jesus. We do not think that John meant to put him in the pillory when he said that he "came to Jesus by night." Jesus did not condemn him, and neither should we. Besides, the night was the time of leisure and quietness. The toil of the day was over. The crowds had dispersed. There was opportunity of personal private talk, such as all earnest inquirers desire when they are to speak of the things which trouble them. Man and beast were seeking rest, and so was he; but it was rest from "the questions which perplexed him" that he sought. It was a great thing that he came, and came so soon, and that it was not bodily healing or any material blessing that he looked for. He is one of the few who thought so much of Jesus and His teaching that they desired to know more. Most of

those who sought Him asked health or healing for themselves or their friends. Was it not one of Jesus' sorrows that the spiritual blessings He desired to bestow were unsought? Was it for this reason that He sighed, as He healed the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech (Mark 7³⁴)? Was it because Jesus longed to hear men ask for the better blessings that He said to so many, "What will ye that I should do unto you?" He asked this question even though the bodily need was evident. It is no wonder that He welcomed Nicodemus when he came to inquire about His teaching.

The fact that Jesus received him without rebuke is a lesson to all spiritual teachers. Timid inquirers should be welcomed in their timidity. "It is always the first step which costs." We have little idea of what it meant to Nicodemus to come to Jesus even by night, and we can as imperfectly understand the real and imaginary fears and shrinkings which inquirers have still to overcome. Let all such timid seekers after light be received with sympathetic kindness, though they come in secret. Would to God that there were more of them! That man is unfit for his position as a helper of men who cannot enter into the feelings of those who come to him burdened

with doubt and fear and perplexity, or who meets them with harshness or contempt. Any lack of tenderness or sympathy at such a time may drive the seekers after light into a night to which there is no dawn.

As far as we can judge, Nicodemus was not making this visit solely on his own account. We believe that it was he who suggested the visit and that he was chiefly interested in it, but that there were others, of the Sanhedrin most likely, who were more or less in sympathy with him, and for whom he spoke. It is not at all improbable that several of his associates were so impressed with the words and works of Jesus that they felt further inquiry should be made as to His aims and message. Nicodemus seems to be speaking for more than himself when he says, "*We* know that Thou art a teacher come from God." Our Lord recognises his representative character in saying, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, *Ye* must be born from above," and "*Ye* receive not our witness." Is it beyond the bounds of possibility that in the Sanhedrin itself there were some men—few at the most—who had escaped the corruption which had infected the great body of the rulers; who were longing for a simpler, truer life for themselves and the people, and were ready to listen to any new voice that seemed to

promise better things? In this private way they may have been trying to sound the man whose help or influence they might find it useful to secure. It gives additional significance to the visit if we regard it in this light. The need of secrecy would be all the more pressing if Nicodemus had a few friends of like mind with himself who were interested in his mission.

The record of the conversation is incomplete. It is inconceivable that the interview only lasted for the few minutes which are required to read aloud the verses in which it is recorded. The night may have merged into day; the full Paschal moon may have set and another day dawned, before Nicodemus, with new light rising in his soul, parted from the Teacher whom he had sought out. It is only the pregnant parts, the essential points of the conversation, which are recorded. There is much compression and some expansion in the narrative. While the ideas are those of the speakers, the form in which they are expressed is the work and art of the Evangelist. There is no need to suppose that the conversation was reported by Nicodemus at a later date. Most likely John and possibly some others of the little band of disciples were present, and were silent auditors of the surprising and moment-

ous interview. Indeed, their presence is almost implied in the statement of verse 11, where Jesus says, "We speak that which we know, and testify that we have seen," though possibly the witness of John the Baptist is also included.

It is, however, a matter of greater importance to determine at what place in the record the conversation ends and the reflections or comments of the Evangelist begin. That there is such a distinction is generally admitted. The expressions, "His only-begotten Son" (verse 16) and "the only-begotten Son of God" (verse 18), are the outcome of faith and reflection on the part of the Evangelist, rather than words of revelation on the part of Jesus. The only question which is not answered with decision is the precise point where the historian becomes the theologian. The line of division which naturally suggests itself is at the close of verse 12, with the words, "How shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" In harmony with this is the fact that in the remainder of the narrative Nicodemus is not directly addressed; the conversational tone is dropped, the personal or individual reference disappears. The truths are expressed in a didactic and universal form. But it is really impossible to draw such a line of division

with any accuracy. The Evangelist himself gives us no indication by which a distinction of this kind can be made. "A modern writer in similar circumstances would feel obliged to ask himself whether the words he was setting down were really spoken or not; but there is no reason to suppose that the author of the Gospel would be conscious of any such obligation. He would not pause to put questions to himself, or to exercise conscious self-criticism. He would just go on writing as the Spirit moved him. And the consequence is that his historical recollections and interpretative reflection, the fruit of thought and experience, have come down to us inextricably blended."¹ The conversation, or at least the instruction of Nicodemus, may not have ceased with the Saviour's question, "How shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" The statements in verses 13-21 have a close relation to the matters which had been under discussion, and have an important bearing on the spiritual condition and action of Nicodemus and the class to which he belonged.

While we accept the form of the narrative as Johannine, especially the portion from verse 13 to verse 21, we regard the ideas which are

¹ Sanday, *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 168, 169.

expressed therein as part of the mind and teaching of Jesus. As Matthew Arnold says (and his literary instinct gives weight to his opinion in a matter of this kind), "The doctrine and discourses . . . cannot in the main be the writer's, because in the main they are clearly out of his reach."¹ Most of what is said in the latter part of the narrative may have been expressed in germ form during the course of the interview with Nicodemus, or in conversation with the disciples when the interview was over. Some of the statements may be based on the instructions of Jesus given to the disciples at later times. They are illustrations of the promised help of the Holy Spirit, "who would guide them into all the truth."² They are inserted here because the thoughts which underlie them were uttered in the course of the conversation. They show the significance of the interview, and indicate how the teaching of Jesus on the Birth from Above is related to the doctrine of the Cross, the Love of God, and Eternal Life.

Brief and concise as the record is, it is of the greatest importance. Erskine of Linlathen calls it one of the "key passages of the Bible." It has been the battle-ground of prolonged

¹ *Literature and Dogma* (London, 1873), p. 170.

² John 16²³, ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ.

controversy. The dust of theological strife lies over it. Can we forget the disputes which have separated men as they studied its words of life? Can we interpret it afresh, see its meaning in the light of the time, and read out its lessons for the individual, the Church, and the world? For it is not enough to understand what it meant to Nicodemus or to the Evangelist. The words of Jesus are for all time and "will outlast the world." They have a meaning for our day as well as for the day when they were first spoken. They are words of life to us as well as to the men of long ago. Each generation must interpret them afresh.

III
DIVINE CREDENTIALS

“ But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, He saith to the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk.”

“The knowledge by Christ of laws of which we are ignorant was not a knowledge separate from His life and character. It was identified with Himself, in the same way as His knowledge of spiritual truth was identified with His character. The authority noticeable in His teaching is also noticeable in His healing . . . the work of healing, therefore, was evidently associated with the unique character of Christ. This is the reason that Christ so constantly appeals to His works to support His claim.”—*The Faith of a Disciple*.

“The miracles (of Jesus) are not a mere embroidery upon the web of the Gospel history ; they form part of the web itself.”—GODET.

CHAPTER III

DIVINE CREDENTIALS

JESUS was a young, untried, unauthorised teacher from the despised province of Galilee. He belonged to the artisan class of the villages. His friends and followers were humble men. Nicodemus was advanced in years, high in station, a recognised authority in Jerusalem, and most likely a man of wealth. We see evidence of great earnestness and open-mindedness, that in these circumstances he sought an interview with Jesus. We would as soon expect to read that a Bishop of the Church of England had sought an interview with George Fox, or that a Cardinal of the Church of Rome desired to meet with some unlicensed preacher of the Protestant faith in the Eternal City. It was no mere wish to gratify a passing curiosity that brought him by night into the presence of Jesus. Nicodemus had been stirred to the depths of his being.

He addresses Him with respect as "Rabbi,"

and speaks to Him as "a teacher come from God." This is not the language of conventional compliment. Jesus had no formal claim to the title. He had not been trained in any of the rabbinical schools which in those days gave to men of the Jewish race the hall-mark of learning. On the lips of Nicodemus the title is an indication not only of respect for Jesus, but also of a certain liberality of outlook, of freedom from narrow scholastic prejudice, which refuses to admit knowledge without the imprimatur of the schools. We must not doubt the sincerity of the admission, "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God," even though it did not mean to Nicodemus all that it might mean. It was certainly the expression of a conviction on his part that there was a unique authority in the words and works of Jesus, which he could only account for by the supposition that He was "from God." It required a conviction of that kind to overcome the prejudices, obstacles, and conventionalities which lay between him and speech with Jesus. The greeting is an indication of the depth of the impression which had been made upon him.

The ministry of our Lord in and around Jerusalem has evidently not been fully recorded. This is a fair inference from the

words wherewith Nicodemus addresses Him. The impression which had been made was much greater than could be expected from what has been recorded. The statement in John 2²³ should be translated, "Many believed in His Name when they saw the miracles which He *kept* doing." Besides, at the end of the Gospel the Evangelist adds that "many other signs truly did Jesus which are not written in this book," and undoubtedly many of these were wrought in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood. It is very remarkable that, though Jesus preached in Jerusalem at a time when it was full of strangers, and large numbers must have listened to Him, it is the private interview with Nicodemus which has received most attention in the record. It was this largely unrecorded ministry of word and work, and of word more than work, which had aroused the interest of Nicodemus. Jesus' power of healing drew many within the reach of His compassion. His wondrous words of grace and wisdom, His moral and spiritual authority, His gift of rest, His gentleness and purity, awakened hope and longing in the hearts of the burdened and the penitent. His teaching quickened thought and interest in minds which were exhausted with the lifeless disquisitions of the orthodox scribes. It

was like the quickening breath of spring after a long and dreary winter.

It was the teaching of Jesus which had especially appealed to Nicodemus. The words of Jesus, like those of John the Baptist, brought up matters in which he as a ruler had a special interest. As a teacher also he was drawn to Him by His teaching. Possibly as one of the learned class he cherished the Messianic hope as the fulfilment of the promise of the coming of a great Prophet. He had been impressed with the miracles, or "signs," as John calls them in his narrative. He would have been untrue to his birth as a Jew if he had not been impressed with them. It was characteristic of Jews to look for signs. But for the miracles, it is possible that Nicodemus might have overlooked the teaching of Jesus. They compelled him to look at it in the light of a possible prophetic revelation, and at Jesus as "a teacher come from God." Like Moses, he must "turn aside and see the great sight." Striking as the signs were, they directed his attention to something which he found still more remarkable, for it was the teaching especially which had quickened in his mind the desire for further knowledge. It was true even then that "never man spake like this Man." To Nicodemus

the miracles gave importance to the teaching. If God were with Him in His works, He must be with Him in His words. He looked upon the miracles as credentials of a divine mission, and it is the most natural way in which to regard them. Indeed, in the time of Nicodemus it was the common way. The Apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, spoke of Jesus as "a man approved of God by the miracles, wonders, and signs which He did." Our Lord Himself regarded them from the same point of view. To the Jews He said, "The works which My Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me" (John 5³⁶). To the disciples of the Baptist, who were sent to ask the doubting question, "Art thou He that should come? or look we for another?" He replied, "Go and tell John the things which ye see and hear. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, to the poor the gospel is preached" (Luke 7²²).

While it is plain that our Lord did regard His works as testimonies to His peculiar mission, we notice that He did not give them a paramount place as influences in the quickening of faith in Him. He refused to give "signs" when they were definitely de-

manded from Him. Once, sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark 8^{11,12}). We also see that He wrought many works of mercy or healing in private, and laid strict injunctions of secrecy on those who had been helped. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, He indicates that miracles could not compel belief. The rich man, in his desire that his five brethren should not come to the place of torment, said, "If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent;" but the reply is an emphatic contradiction of that idea: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16³¹). We also see that He makes the dependence on miracles a ground of reproach in the words addressed to the nobleman of Capernaum: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4⁴⁸), and that He values highly the faith which exists without them, as when He said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20²⁹).

But it would be entirely wrong to say that He did not regard His "works" as of great

importance. Although He refused to give "signs" when they were asked, He referred to them as proofs of the truth of His mission, saying, "The works that I do in My Father's name bear witness of Me" (John 10²⁵). A "mighty work" wrought under such conditions would have been untrue to the spirit and character of His ministry. It would have been a concession to unbelief, an admission that what He had done and said was not a sufficient ground for faith. It seems to have been an essential feature of all His miracles that they should not be wrought expressly as "signs." That was the principle which was firmly and finally settled in the Temptation in the Wilderness. But when wrought for other and higher reasons, as works of grace and mercy, they became His witnesses, the evidence of what He was and what He had come to do. It is in this sense that they are His credentials.

It was reserved for a more subtle and analytic age, to point out that the power to work miracles was no necessary proof of the truth of what the worker of miracles might say, and to ask—

"How shall some strange breach of natural law
Be proof of moral truth?"¹

¹ Sir Lewis Morris, *Songs of Two Worlds*.

Matthew Arnold insinuates this in his famous suggestion, that the power to change a pen-wiper into a pen would be no proof of the truth of what the pen might write. But the suggestion is neither fair nor adequate. It was not wonders of this magical sort that Jesus did, or that had attracted the attention of Nicodemus. It was not clever prodigies or tricks which had given him the impression that Jesus was "a teacher come from God." Nicodemus had a wiser instinct for the presence of the divine. He laid emphasis on the character of the miracles which Jesus wrought. He said, "No man can do these miracles which Thou doest, except God be with him." They were of the same character as those which have been recorded. They were more than wonders. In the mind of Nicodemus they had a relation to the teaching of Jesus. He came to Him as a teacher, because of the signs which He did.

We must not suppose that Nicodemus saw all the significance of the miracles of Jesus when he recognised them as credentials of a divine mission. They are more than that. They are not like seals attached to a document, certifying its truth, and without which it would not be valid. They are an integral part of the revelation of His personality. We

know Him by His works. They reveal His spirit and His power. In performing them He invoked no other name. They are His own. "The supernatural Person explains the supernatural events. The true key to every act is in the personality of the actor. . . . To the supernatural Christ the miracles are natural; they are simply the good works which He shows."¹

They are also an integral part of His redemptive mission. With very few exceptions they are works of mercy and restoration. "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed . . . the poor have the gospel preached unto them." They are essential features of the gospel, and are in harmony with it. They are both elements and methods of revelation, creating the ground on which faith can rest, in the grace and redemption of the Saviour from sin. The cure of the man that was sick of the palsy is a pregnant example of the place which His miracles held in what we may call the scheme of His ministry. He wrought the work of healing that it might be the proof of His power to forgive sins, saying, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, . . . I say unto thee, Arise,

¹ Chadwick, *Expositor*, Fourth Series, vol. v. pp. 42, 43.

take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house" (Mark 2^{10,11}). Belief in the possibility of a work of grace in the soul was based on the fact that He had performed a miracle of healing on the body.

The "works" of Jesus far transcend the ordinary experience of mankind, but that is true of every part and aspect of the gospel which is named by His Name. His character, His words, His great redeeming and revealing work, equally transcend the attainments and the thoughts of men. But how can an order of grace show or prove itself in the order of nature, unless by works in the sphere of nature, which are beyond and above its scope? If we say that "grace came by Jesus Christ" we have given room and reason for His miracles. The Evangelist calls them what they are, "signs,"—"signs in the Seen of the power which Jesus exercised in the Unseen,"¹ the revelation and evidence before men, of the invisible spiritual grace which God in Christ has bestowed upon mankind. They cannot be set aside. As well take the heart from the body of a man and expect him to continue to live and work as before. If the miraculous elements are to be excluded from the life, work, and teaching of Jesus, we are

¹ Garvie, *Expositor*, Sixth Series, vol. vi. p. 358.

unable to recognise what is left as constituting a revelation of grace.¹ The historical results of His lifework become inexplicable. The effects surpass the cause. It is only when we accept the Christ of the Gospels in the fulness of His representation there, that we find a cause which is adequate to produce the vast results which He has accomplished in the world, and the yet greater results with which He is to bless mankind.

It is for these reasons that we hold fast by the miraculous works of Jesus. They are still credentials because they are elements of the revelation of grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. They defy all analysis which would treat them as later accretions which can be removed, like moss from an old inscription or stains from a marble statue, and leave the teaching of Jesus more clear and the real divineness of His character more apparent. We cannot forego one of the signs which He did. "They entwine themselves with the entire thread of His history, and weave themselves into His teaching. They become Him so naturally that their absence would seem more wonderful than their presence. They appear the spontaneous outflow of an inborn power, bridled oftentimes by a wise

¹ Bruce, *Chief End of Revelation*, pp. 175-207.

and dignified self-restraint, but always unlocked by the touch of pity and at the cry of need. Their highest glory lies not in their various and limitless control of physical nature, but in their moral character. The summary of them is that 'He went about doing good.' And in the midst of them all Jesus continues the greatest miracle."¹

¹ Conder, *Basis of Faith*, p. 307.

IV

THE TWO KINGDOMS; THE NEW IDEA

"No one has strength enough to rise ; someone must stretch out a hand."—SENECA.

"Lord, I have fasted ; I have prayed,
And sackcloth has my garment been.
To purge my soul I have essayed
With hunger blank and vigil keen.
O God of mercy, why am I
Still haunted by the self I fly?"

"How small of all that human hearts endure
That part which laws and kings can cure."

"Christianity relies on inspiration, not on aspiration."

"No religious man ought to hold aloof from politics."

FRA PAOLI SARPI.

"Out of the shadow of night
The world rolls into light ;
There is daybreak everywhere."

CHAPTER IV

THE TWO KINGDOMS; THE NEW IDEA

NICODEMUS did not come to Jesus to talk about His miracles; he came to talk about His teaching. There was something in it which attracted but troubled him. It was "new teaching." It bewildered him as he tried to reconcile it with the common formulas and ideas of the day—formulas which he had accepted, ideas which he himself expounded. These had not satisfied him, had not given him rest or power. Would the new Teacher, whose works were the signs of a divine authority, answer his questions, solve his doubts, and satisfy his heart?

It is evident that the chief matter about which he wished to inquire was the Kingdom of God. That had been the subject of the preaching of John the Baptist. It was also the subject of the general teaching of Jesus. We cannot tell how Nicodemus indicated what his difficulties and longings were, but in measure

we can imagine how he did so. He shared in the popular ideas of the time. The Kingdom of God was to be for Jews, and especially for such obedient sons of the Law as the Pharisees. It was theirs by right of birth, and was assured to them by righteousness. It was to come to them by ordinary generation, as descendants of Abraham. It was a grand thing to be a Jew. It was said that "a single Israelite was of more worth in the sight of God than all the nations of the earth."¹ "It was for them that God had created the world."² The Kingdom was surely theirs; but when was it to be inaugurated? How was it to be set up? What were the changes it was to bring about? Where were men like Nicodemus to be in the new order of the State? The questions of the disciples of Jesus at a later time help us to understand the outlook and perplexities of Nicodemus.

The first words of Jesus in the narrative introduced him to a new world of thought, brought before him ideas which were far removed from those which were in his mind before he came into His presence. The "Kingdom" of Jesus was something widely different from that of Nicodemus. He said,

¹ IV. Esdras, 6⁵⁵.

² Book of Sifri, quoted in Geikie's *Life of Christ*, vol. i. p. 9.

“Except a man be born from above,¹ he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”² The declaration is not a careless utterance. It is prefaced by the solemn assurance of its truth. It is emphasised by the words, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee.” A host of misconceptions were smitten by the declaration. The Kingdom of God was not a national inheritance or a racial blessing. It was to begin not with the race or tribe, but with the individual, without reference to such distinctions, and was therefore universal. Descent from Abraham gave the Jew no peculiar right of entrance into it. It only gave him the inestimable advantages of hearing the good news in his own language and from the lips of Christ, and an early opportunity of entering. The gospel was preached “to the Jew first,” but he had to receive the blessing on the same conditions as any other member of the human family. The birth of nature availed nothing, only the birth from above.

Neither were learning, social influence, nor moral reputation the *Sesame* before which its gates would fly open. All these excellences and advantages were present in Nicodemus. If ever any man might hope to enter the Kingdom of God because of what he was, it was

¹ Note E.

² Note F.

he. If the words of our Lord insisting on the necessity of the birth from above had been addressed to a publican, or to the woman that was a sinner (Luke 7³⁷), it might have been possible for men to think and say that it only applied to outcasts of society, to men and women whose habits of life were irregular or immoral. The saying might also have been interpreted as requiring merely a moral reformation from such as these, before they could be received into the Kingdom. But the words were spoken to a man like Nicodemus, and therefore they effectively shut out all considerations of moral excellence or worldly position as bestowing merit on the man who possessed them. The necessity of the new birth attaches to the nature of man, not to his character or social standing. As the Kingdom is universal in its width, so also is the condition of entrance into it.

It was not even a future blessing for which men had still to wait and watch and pray. A birth implies a life, and since men are to be born into the Kingdom while they are in this world, it is a present life. It requires only this experience from above to let it be seen—that is, to let it be possessed and enjoyed here and now—for in spiritual matters “to see” is “to have.” In its essential character the

Kingdom of God is the reign of God in the soul of man, initiated and maintained by His power. But it is not an alien rule imposed from without and obeyed unwillingly. They who are born from above have been brought into new relations with God; His Spirit dwells in their heart; His will is a delight, the secret of the soul's true life, the source of its joy and peace. Whatever may be the future glories of the Kingdom when it becomes indeed a Kingdom of Heaven, it is founded on earth amid the shadows of Time.

The thought that was in the mind of Nicodemus about the Kingdom of God was very different from this. He had expected that it was to come from God, but it was to be as one of the kingdoms of this world, not greatly differing from them in its character, aims, and methods. "The Jewish state was the germ cell of the coming kingdom. Let that state get but a fair chance, let Providence governing all things bring back more genial political conditions, and the lowly state would develop into the peerless and triumphant kingdom of the prophetic visions."¹ This was the Jewish Utopia. The special features and distinction of the Kingdom lay in the person of the Messianic King or Prophet, and the

¹ Selby, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Privilege*, p. 67.

powers which He would exercise. It was a new State that was to be born, not a new man. The individual was to be affected by the change in his conditions. He was to be free, prosperous, happy. Above all, it was to be for Jews.

The Kingdom of Jesus is not of this kind. It is not of this world or of man's making, for it comes from above. It begins with the individual, is quickened within him. There is no repeating of

"Man's wonderful and wide mistake.
Man lumps his kind in the mass,
God singles them unit by unit."¹

This principle of the Kingdom was based on a new conception of the worth of the individual, and the possibility of personal relations between God and man independent of his national and family connections. These truths were not unknown in Jewish thought. They had been affirmed by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and some of the Psalmists, but their teaching had not permanently impressed itself on the national consciousness. It was Jesus who finally set the individual apart from the family and the nation, gave him the consciousness of personal rights and responsibilities, made him a distinct object of the grace of God. But in

¹ R. Browning.

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this view of the value of the individual life there is not included the power to enter into the Kingdom. Entrance into it is secured by the action of a supernal power. The change which this power produces is so great that it can only be adequately represented by the figure of birth.

In all this we have the central principle of the religion of Jesus.

The grace and power of God have come nearer to man, creating the possibility of closer and more intimate relations with him. It is the man and not the State which is the unit with which they begin their work. It is with the inner life and the relations of that life with God that they are paramountly concerned.

But though the Kingdom of God begins with the individual and his inner life, it would be foolish and untrue to say that it ends there. No change in the inner life of man can be without effect on the conditions and relations of his outer life. It is one of the distinctive powers of life that it modifies the environment in which it finds itself. Nay more, the idea of a kingdom includes the idea of a society. It is an organism. Out of the individual units it forms a larger unity in which the reign of God is still the ruling principle.

These conceptions of the Kingdom of God

which we find opposed in Nicodemus and Jesus, are conceptions which still exist in opposition. The thought of Nicodemus in its essential form is still the dream and belief of almost every political and social reformer. Men will be happy, prosperous, and good, if only the outward conditions are improved. Mr. John Morley says that "the central moral doctrine of the French Revolution was that 'human nature is good, and that the evil in the world is the result of bad education and bad institutions.'"¹ In one form or another this idea underlies all the great reforming movements of the world. Let the outward conditions be changed for the better, and deliverance will be secured from all the ills which vex humanity. It is impossible to withhold sympathy and admiration from the aims of those who seek the elevation of society through schemes and methods of political or social reform. They must never be lost sight of by the Christian. They are part of the will of God for the life of man. The healing ministry of Jesus is the justification and inspiration of all forms of social service. It is His spirit which animates them, even though those who are engaged in them are unconscious of His influence. But the ends which

¹ *Diderot*, vol. i. p. 5.

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Jesus seeks are higher. He includes them and transcends them, and the ways in which He endeavours to secure His higher ends are more radical and distinctive. They are not mechanical but organic, not external but internal, not political but spiritual. He deals with the problems which ever lie closest to the heart of the world. It is not that which enters into a man, or that which is outside of him, which elevates or degrades him. The secret source of all the real evil as of all the real good in the world is within the man. "Through all time, if we read aright, sin was, is, and shall be the parent of misery."¹ Deeper than all other healers of the world's woe, Jesus saw that the bitter root from which it grew was sin—"Corruption and disease have a spiritual origin."² Therefore it is in the inner life, where sin has its seat, that all effective reform must begin. But "effective reform" is no adequate description of the ends which Jesus has in view. He introduces no mere moral or social expedient, but a divine, creative principle. In place of compulsion from without, there is to be impulsion from within.³ It is the beginning of a new life from above—that

¹ Carlyle, *French Revolution*.

² Pulsford, *Quiet Hours*, p. 4.

³ Coe, *Religion of a Mature Mind*, pp. 11, 31.

is, a change in the outlook, relations, and ruling principles of the soul, wrought by the power of God. The life from above changes not only man's relations to God, but changes also all his relations to his fellows. It permeates all the forms and activities of life. The new man will alter the outer conditions, so that they form a better environment for himself and for others.

"Nothing in this world is single,
All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle."¹

It has been the fault, the grave fault, of those who have been born from above, that they have been too easily contented with personal salvation, and have limited their outlook to the interests of their own families or churches. It was the surprise and sorrow of Father Dolling that he found "the human so ungodly" and "the godly so inhuman."² These have neglected too much those aspects of the Kingdom of God which relate to the social and political life of the world. They have forgotten that one-half of the law of the Kingdom is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and that the prayer which the Saviour put on their lips has the great petitions: "Thy Kingdom come: Thy Will be done on earth

¹ Shelley.

² *Life of Father Dolling*, p. 149.

as it is in heaven." The wonderful and gracious ministry of help and healing which the Saviour carried on so constantly was a revelation of the social activities of the Kingdom of God, and stands as an example for all His followers. "A spiritual religion is a social religion."¹ "I have no sympathy," says one, "with the Christians who talk only of heaven and eternity while the wrongs of earth are unredressed." Father Dolling declared that "he dared not go on ministering there (in St. Agatha's), without letting men know that he believed every social question was a question of the Lord Jesus."² "Religious ends are always social, never merely individual." "I do not doubt for a moment," says Rothe, "that the Lord Jesus has a far deeper interest nowadays in the development of our political condition than in our so-called Church movements and questions of the day. He knows well which has the more important issues behind it."³ The fact that the Kingdom of God is "righteousness,

¹ Coyle, *Spirit in Life and Literature*, p. 20.

² *Life of Father Dolling*, p. 128.

³ *Still Hours*, p. 333. He also says, "I am firmly convinced that the invention of steam-engines and railroads has had a much more important positive influence in furthering the Kingdom of God than the elaboration of the dogmas of Nicæa and Chalcedon."—*Still Hours*, p. 406.

peace, joy in the Holy Ghost," is a plain indication that it has social effects and relations. Righteousness, peace, and joy are social virtues or qualities, and cannot be confined within the soul. If they could be, "'twere all alike as if we had them not." If they are in us they will "go forth of us." Christianity cannot neglect personal salvation, but neither can it be content with it. Personal salvation and social service is the real rule of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus would heal the deep sore of the world by the renewing power of the Spirit of God. In Comte's phrase, He aims at the "spiritual reorganisation of society." He would start where the root of the evil is, and work upward and outward through all human relations and conditions. He thinks not so much of effects as of causes. He would change the man, and through the change in the man change, if need be, the conditions in which he lives. It is remarkable how little heed Jesus seems to give to the outward conditions of the life of the people among whom He lived. He says nothing about slavery, that "sum of all iniquities"; nothing about political emancipation from the grinding yoke of Rome; nothing about the wrongfulness that lies in social inequalities; nothing of war, that "most futile and

ferocious of human follies.”¹ He had His mind fixed on deeper evils in the nature of man. He did not attempt to change the outward conditions directly; He sought the indirect but radical way of curing them. He was not an avowed reformer of social abuses; He is the Redeemer of the souls of men. His gift was not a new morality, but a new life. He would set up the Kingdom of God in the individual, as the first step towards establishing it in the world. This was, if we may so speak, the new idea of Jesus. Man was wrong with others because he was wrong with himself. He was wrong with himself because he was wrong with God. The Kingdom begins with bringing the individual into right relations with God. With the accomplishment of that all things are possible. The new man can repeat the line of Terence which thrilled the ancient world: “Nothing human is alien to me.” It is his privilege and duty to hallow every department of human activity. The world is transfigured to him. A light shines over it such as never dawned on sea or shore. He knows that there hath come “a glory” to “the earth.”

God is at the beginning of the new heavens and the new earth as He was at the beginning

¹ Marquis of Lansdowne, Secretary of War, 1904.

of the old. The new man and the new State start with Him. When the Declaration of the Rights of Man was under discussion in the French Assembly at the time of the Revolution, Abbé Gregoire said, "Write at the head of that Declaration the name of God." The Assembly refused, but the Abbé was right. It is God alone who can make all things new.

The change which is inaugurated by His grace and power is so great and so decisive that it is called a birth. The power that is to effect it is the Spirit of God coming from above, and coming to man as man. The gospel is the revelation of the new era which has dawned: "The time is fulfilled: the Kingdom of God is at hand." God is now to work in man more powerfully and more graciously than before for the redemption of humanity through the redemption of the individual. This is the "good news." This is the gospel. It is this "thought of God" which is "the sunshine of the world."

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." The new era begins not with a new morality, or a social or political reformation, but with a new life. The New Testament is the first record of that life, the life which Jesus had in Himself, and which He gave abundantly to

others. The revelation of its possibilities is not complete. Additional discoveries and achievements are to be expected. The seed did not bring forth all its fruit at the beginning. The leaven of "life" did not spread to the limits of the mass in which it wrought in the first century. The Tree of Life is still bearing fruit. The leaven is still working. The "good Lord Jesus" has not yet "had His day." In the course of the Christian centuries it has enriched the world with unthought-of good. It has sanctified human life, and made it precious. It has made slavery impossible in a Christian land. It has lifted womanhood to its present honour. It has saved, and is saving the children. All homes of refuge, healing, and mercy are of its building. The social strife of labour and capital, the sordidness of toil, the horrors of drunkenness, prostitution, and war, have been lessened and relieved by its reconciling, purifying, and redeeming power. And "greater works" than these the seed of this new life will accomplish as it advances to maturity. Only the first-fruits of the harvest have been gathered in, and they are the promise of richer good which is yet to be reaped. The New Life is as the Tree in the midst of the Paradise of God which "yieldeth its fruit every

month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." The ages of faith are not behind us, but before us. We yet await

"The vision of the Christian man
In virtue as in stature great,
Embodied in a Christian state."¹

"The vision is yet for an appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay."²

¹ Whittier.

² Hab. 2³, R.V.

V
MISUNDERSTANDINGS

"Theories cannot change the order of nature."

MARGARET DELAND, *Sidney*.

"It is a common failing with old men to attribute all wisdom to themselves. Nestor did it long ago."

H. FIELDING, *Amelia*.

"It would be a poor design indeed for the bettering of the world which a man could see either quite round the outside or quite the inside of."

RUSKIN, *Fors v*.

"We are born the second time as we were born the first time, without knowing what has happened to us. All life in its beginnings is weak and timid in its movements; it is folly to worry it into precocious activity."

DR. DALE, *Commentary on Ephesians*.

"Columbus might have turned back when the first drift-wood floated out to him from America, on the ground that it was useless to discover a continent consisting only of dead logs."

Review of Reviews.

"What to Plato was but a hallucination, and to Socrates a chimera, is now clear to your Zinzendorfs, your Wesleys, and the poorest of their Pietists and Methodists."

CARLYLE, *Sartor Resartus*.

CHAPTER V

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

“THE natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.” This is the fact which lies behind the questions of Nicodemus : “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (John 3⁴). It seems to be hard doctrine, but it is true—

“For who can paint a sunbeam to the blind,
Or make him feel a shadow with his mind?”¹

Spiritual facts and ideas can never be fully expressed. Human language belittles them. It is ever an alien or at least a foreign tongue. It is in this relation that the Italian saying is emphatically true : “Translation is treason.” Spiritual things are always imperfectly “bodied forth” in such poor symbols as our life affords.

¹ Decker and Middleton.

Indeed, "all words on the highest of subjects are but signals made to each other by spirits in prison, with a world of things to think and to say that our signals cannot describe at all."¹

Our Lord made large demands on the symbolism of time to set forth the things of His eternal kingdom. He had to invent many of His figures. He could not tell us what the Kingdom of God is. He could only tell us what it is like. Each of His parables, or parabolic sayings, reveals something of its character or essence. Much is revealed, but much is still concealed until the spiritual powers are quickened and developed by which we may know "the things which are freely given to us of God."

The Lord Jesus seems to have varied His symbolism in accordance with the audience He was addressing. He "was responsive to every subtle breath in His surroundings."² He adapted His figures to the condition and capacities of those who heard Him. To the peasant woman at the well of Sychar He made the water which she came to draw an emblem of the Eternal Life which He was ready and eager to bestow. To the general crowd of Jews who had been impressed by the

¹ Sir James F. Stephen.

² Selby, *Ministry of the Lord Jesus*, p. 302.

miracle of the loaves He made the "bread which perishes" the type of Himself, "the Bread of Life." His figures are simple, especially when He is speaking in public, or to men and women in humble walks of life. He brought the Kingdom into touch with familiar things: the sowing of seed, its growth in the field, the ingathering and separations of harvest, the drawing of nets, the working of leaven, the search for a lost sheep and a lost coin. He linked it with buying and selling, with building, with marrying and giving in marriage. But with Nicodemus, the trained scholar, the experienced teacher, He employs a figure most pregnant with meaning and mystery. He speaks of the Kingdom of God in what we may almost call scientific terms. He would tell him more than He had told to others because it was to be expected that he could receive more.

The Kingdom of God is begun by a birth from above. A new life quickened by the power of God is the only way by which entrance into it can be secured. It is not a political re-arrangement or a social revolution. It is a new life originated in the individual by a power from on high. This is a fresh fact of revelation, with all its wonderful content of hope and help for humankind. God, who had

never left Himself without a witness, was to come nearer to man, giving him by His grace a new life through which he could live in happier and closer relations with Him.

But the trained scholar of the Rabbis is a backward pupil in the school of Christ. He does not understand, or he feels that the idea belongs to the region of the impossible. It may have been the shock of surprise which led him to make the answer, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" But there is just a possibility that he is smiling at the apparent absurdity of the demand. The old teacher who had seen and heard many a youthful visionary may have thought that now he had met with another. The idea of a new birth was not unknown to him. It was a commonplace of rabbinical teaching. But the experience was reserved for Gentiles. It was needless for Jews. One can scarcely imagine that the experienced teacher of Israel mistook figure for fact, and interpreted literally what had been expressed symbolically. He may have found by experience that the new birth as applied to Gentiles was a phrase without any real meaning, and that the Gentile remained a Gentile in spite of it. He did not expect that one whom he thought of as a

teacher come from God, would repeat such a useless formula. Putting aside all the time-worn phraseology of the day, he may have wished to get to facts. What was the use of talking to him of impossibilities? "How can a man be born when he is old?" He had seen too much of life and had thought too much of its problems to be put off with outworn phrases. He expected more than an ancient formula from a teacher who had wrought such signs.

That may be the explanation of his question, but there is still the possibility that he simply misunderstood the words of Jesus. He *may* have taken figure for fact, and understood literally what was expressed symbolically. He may have attributed to Jesus the absurdity of requiring that those who entered into the Kingdom of God should begin life again as at birth. He had never expected that such a demand would be made in regard to a Jew. For the moment he may have been thrown into mental confusion, and feeling that he must say something, uttered the first thought which the words of Jesus suggested. Apparently it took him out of his depth to hear this teacher who had come from God declare, as a primary and essential principle, that a man—even such an one as himself—required the experience of another birth.

We do not know if the conversation was carried on in Aramaic or in Greek. But if it was in Aramaic, it is almost certain that the word which we translate "from above" had something of the same ambiguity in Aramaic which it has in Greek. It may mean "again," "anew," "a second time," or "from above." It was this ambiguity which tested the spiritual quality of Nicodemus, and suggested to his startled or sceptical mind his foolish answer. It was his ignorance of spiritual things, and his misconceptions of the Kingdom of God which Jesus preached, which were the real causes of his confusion and perplexity. He was thinking of a kingdom of this world, into which he would enter because he was a Jew. The kingdom of which Jesus spoke was of a higher quality, and the birthright of entrance into it was higher also. It was a birth from above. To Nicodemus the doctrine was absurd.

Misunderstanding in regard to this matter has not ceased. The doctrine of the new birth is still a source of perplexity and amazement to many. It is said of an Archbishop of York, that he once rebuked one of his clergy in words that sound strangely from the lips of a Christian preacher, saying, "He would be better employed in preaching the morality of

Socrates, than in canting about the new birth.”¹ There are many who dismiss the truth as the cant of evangelicalism; who see nothing but absurdity or impossibility in it. It still remains true that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” “They are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” It is easy to misunderstand or misrepresent a truth which is instinct with the grace and hope of the gospel. Yet where there is any glimmer of spiritual intelligence the idea of the new birth quickly commends itself. The Old Testament promise, “A new heart also will I give you,” misleads no one, and the new birth is equally intelligible. For it must never be forgotten that the expression “born from above” is only a figure—one illustration among the many which are employed to describe the beginning of salvation in the soul of man. It is a passing “from darkness to light,” “from the power of Satan unto God,” a “conversion,” turning to God from idols. It is a “redemption” from slavery, a “rising from the dead into newness of life.” It is a “justification” as in a court of law. There is no end to the symbolism of salvation. All the great experiences of the life of man which

¹ Birrell, *Res Judicatae*, p. 16.

involve a radical or effectual change, are susceptible of spiritual significance. The figure of birth differs from all others only in the pregnancy of its meaning, and in its suggestiveness of mystery and human helplessness. The life of the Kingdom of God is something different from the natural life of man. The experience with which it begins is so thorough in its effects and so hidden in its method that it is likened to a birth. In no clearer way could the distinctively spiritual character of that life be described. It is also an emphatic expression of the place and power of God in the quickening of the new life. As no one can beget himself, or bring himself to the birth of nature, so no one can lift himself into the life that is born from above. But while the doctrine so effectually shuts the door on the side of human power, it is full of the grandest and most gracious hopes for man. It is the essence of the good news of the gospel. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." His need is so great that he requires to be born from above to enable him to enter into the Kingdom of God, but there is in the gospel the promise of a power that can effect it. The necessity of the change is the assurance that it is God's will to produce it. Like "Rabbi" Duncan, we can take comfort from

the absoluteness of the demand, and say that the "must" implies a "may."

The birth from above does not effect a change in the constitution of man. In essential nature he remains the same as before. But he has entered into new relations with God. New perceptions are quickened in his mind ; new feelings fill his heart ; new aims are the inspirations of his actions, and new principles the guides of his will. His powers and faculties are unaltered, but they are consecrated to new ends. "He has come to such a state that he neither seeketh, desireth, nor meaneth, but that the will of God may be fulfilled in him, by him, and through him. Such an one has already become a kingdom of God, and God ruleth there."¹ A change has passed over him like that which "passes over a Norwegian night, when the rose of evening becomes silently the rose of dawn."² The only adequate description of it is to say that a new man has been born. In tendency, character, aim, and motive, "old things are passed away, behold all things have become new."

Had the idea of a birth *from above* been kept before the Church of Christ, it would have been impossible for anyone to imagine that such a change could be brought about by the adminis-

¹ Tauler.

² F. W. H. Myers, *Classical Essays*, p. 166.

tration of any rite or sacrament. "Souls are not made by machinery." Children are not born from above by a baptism of water. "To me," says one, "it is a most extraordinary and impossible hallucination. My own whole mind and heart would have to be taken down and built up again upon another, an absolutely other, pattern; my whole experience, observation, and study of these divine things would have to be turned upside down, before I could possibly believe in 'baptismal regeneration.' No; there is no such thing. There could not be. Certainly, to me at least, there is no such materialistic, mechanical, and unspiritual doctrine or precept here."¹ The Spirit of God is alone adequate to produce the change by which a man sees the Kingdom of God. It is a change in the life. It is spiritual in character. Therefore the means must be spiritual also.

¹ Dr. Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*.

VI
EXPLANATIONS

"The bubble of heredity has been pricked . . . we know now that there is no hereditary 'governing class,' any more than a hereditary hooliganism."—BERNARD SHAW, *The Superman*, xxiv.

"We are but organs mute, till the Master touches the keys ;
Verily vessels of earth, into which God poureth the wine ;
Harps are we, silent harps, that have hung in the willow
trees,
Dumb till our heart strings swell, and break with a pulse
divine."—F. W. H. MYERS.

"There is a day in spring,
When under all the earth the secret germs
Begin to stir and glow before they bud,
The wealth and festal pomps of midsummer
Lie in the heart of that inglorious hour
Which no man names with blessing, though its work
Is blessed by all the world. Such days there are
In the slow story of the growth of souls."

MISS SMEDLEY.

"Renew in me the spirit of a child,
That to Thy Kingdom I may enter in."

M. CROSBY.

"Vous n'avez qu' à vouloir et le regne commence
Pour tous ! Pour tous ! Un peu d'amour, un peu de foi,
Et vous verrez quel beau royaume."

E. ROSTAND, *La Samaritaine*.

CHAPTER VI

EXPLANATIONS

OUR Lord's reply to the questions of Nicodemus is evidently an explanation of the statement which he could not understand—"Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." The Saviour shows Himself ready to help in perplexity and bewilderment. He seeks to come closer to this inquirer. He expresses the great revolutionary idea in another, and in what we believe was a more personal, way. The explanation, however, is still weighted with the solemn assurance, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee." This affirmation is not to be forgotten, while other things are explained. "This," He seems to say, "is the truth, however strange and difficult it may appear." Our Lord does not speak as one who "thinks," but as one who knows. The ambiguous phrases are replaced by others that are more definite—"born from above" by "born of water and Spirit," and "to

see the Kingdom of God " by " to enter into " it. It is not another kind of birth which is spoken of, and it is not another result which is produced. He who is born from above is born of water and Spirit, and he who sees the Kingdom of God has entered into it. The new phrases are used to make the statement of verse 3 simple and clear.¹

We cannot say if Nicodemus found the explanation sufficient, but we have to admit that in one respect it introduces a new difficulty. The linking of "water" with "Spirit" makes the word of Christ a dark saying to us. "Water" is not again referred to in the context. If "born from above" had only been interpreted by "born of the Spirit," the explanation would at once have appeared to us as adequate, helpful, and clear. The passage would have been simple and homogeneous. So incongruous has "water" appeared in this context, that it has been proposed to delete it. It has been regarded as a tendency reading which was inserted at an early date, because of the importance which was given to baptism in the sub-apostolic Church.² But we must not think of cutting out words from the New Testament because we have difficulty in understanding them. By yielding to tempta-

¹ Note G.

² Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, i. 91, notes.

tions of ease or simplicity, we may lose some truths which would enrich our knowledge of the Word of God. Hard things are often precious, and we may find it so in this case.

We agree with those who see that a reference to Christian baptism is inadmissible here. We cannot exalt Christian baptism to the position which such an interpretation would give to it. Besides, our Lord is making an explanation, and any reference to Christian baptism would mar His purpose. A prophetic intimation regarding it would have greatly increased the perplexity of Nicodemus. "Water," if it is to be retained in the text, must be interpreted as referring to something that he already knew.

As a member of the Sanhedrin, it is practically certain that Nicodemus had already heard of "water and Spirit" in connection with the Kingdom of God. Priests and Levites had been sent from Jerusalem to John the Baptist to ask, "Who art thou?" and "Why baptizest thou?" Most likely they had been sent by the Sanhedrin, and had reported what they had heard of the preaching and mission of John. But even if they had not been sent in this official way, the emphatic declarations of John, given as they were in different forms and at different times, must have been known to a

man in the position of Nicodemus. It has even been suggested that he was one of the deputation that went to question the Baptist.¹ John had said, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." "I baptize with water unto repentance, but He that cometh after me . . . shall baptize with the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 3¹¹). The far-spreading influence of John's ministry, the intense interest which his preaching excited, give good ground for supposing that Nicodemus was familiar, or at least acquainted, with it. The connection between Jesus and John was also a public fact, and it was to be expected that their teaching would be similar in some respects. John had represented his baptism of water unto repentance as inadequate, but not therefore as unnecessary. He had also indicated the kind of baptism which would supply all that was lacking in his—a baptism of Spirit. These were prominent elements in his teaching. Our Lord, therefore, is not using strange or unheard-of words in speaking to Nicodemus about "water and Spirit" in relation to the Kingdom of God. He is actually repeating the words of John in another form. All these considerations make it most probable that our Lord is referring to John's baptism of water, and that He is intimating to Nicodemus that

¹ Dr. Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*.

repentance is an essential condition of entrance into the Kingdom of God. But why should He give such emphasis to this in speaking to Nicodemus? Repentance is a spiritual result. It is included in the work of the Spirit. To be "born of the Spirit" involves and includes repentance. Repentance unto life—real repentance—is impossible apart from His gracious and soul-searching influences. Either those are right who regard the word "water" as an unauthorised interpolation, or there was some *personal* reason connected with the past experiences of Nicodemus which made it a word of grave and painful meaning to him. Can any such experience be suggested? We believe it was our Lord's intention, in speaking of water here, to recall to his mind the teaching of the Baptist about repentance. The Pharisees as a class had refused the baptism of John. They did not see or feel that they needed to repent. They "rejected the counsel of God against themselves." That was a fact of great spiritual significance which Jesus was not likely to ignore in dealing with one of them. In the record of His intercourse with individuals we recognise that He generally sought to lay hold of some moral, spiritual, or even physical fact in their personal experience. To the woman at the well of Jacob

He said, "Go call thy husband and come hither." To the rich young man who asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He replied, "Sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow Me." The disciple who eagerly volunteered to be received as one of the little company of His personal followers was answered with the gentle words of refusal, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." (This scribe may have been physically unfit for the strain of an itinerant ministry.) All these sayings had a personal reference. There was something in the life of each which was touched by them. Is it not most likely that there was an endeavour to reach the conscience of Nicodemus by a reference to the pregnant spiritual fact that he and his associates had rejected the teaching of John? At a later period of our Lord's ministry we can see that it was John's teaching which was His testing principle in dealing with the Pharisees—"The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?" (Matt. 21²⁵). If ever a man gave proof of having divine authority, it was John. His thrilling message, his power of conviction, his dauntless courage, his unstained character, were signs to all who wished to see that he

was indeed a messenger of God. It is quite in the line of the Saviour's method that He should say something to Nicodemus which had a peculiar personal reference to him or to the class to which he belonged. The relation of the Pharisees to John, and the importance which our Lord attached to it, make it almost certain that in dealing with a Pharisee He would refer to it. If it was so, He was now recalling to the mind of Nicodemus what was perhaps a forgotten conflict and defeat of conscience. A "Voice" for God had spoken and had been neglected. "The teacher" of Israel had stood aloof when a prophet had spoken of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." Jesus was repeating the truth and duty which Nicodemus had refused, that *he*, Pharisee as he was, must repent if he would enter the Kingdom of God. The self-righteous idea that a descendant of Abraham was a special favourite of Heaven, the moral pride which had kept him from yielding to the call of John, must be discarded. He had to humble himself to the position of a penitent. There was no other way into the Kingdom. Like the "flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way to the tree of life," the necessity of repentance met him.

This interpretation not only explains the

mention of "water," but it accounts for its emphatic position. If Nicodemus understood the word in this sense, it would have no difficulty for him. It would only bring back a painful memory, which it may be he never wished to recall. Did he shrink at the word? Was it an arrow that pierced his conscience? Did he feel more convinced than ever that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, because no one could read the secrets of the heart as He had done? The word has been a stumbling-block to us because we have taken what was intended for an individual man as if it were intended for everyone. We have read the verse as if it had no peculiar significance for the person to whom it was first spoken, forgetting that that must always be a primary consideration, forgetting also that it is twice said with emphasis, "Verily, verily, I say unto *thee*." The special form of the statement "born of water and Spirit" is due to the fact that it is addressed to a particular individual. The reference to repentance under the symbol of water is unnecessary in the declaration of a universal principle about entrance into the Kingdom of God. But in dealing with a man who had rejected the preaching of repentance it was necessary to remind him of his disobedience, and to press on him again what he

had before refused. By treating the passage in this way we solve the difficulty which has hitherto attended its interpretation. Recognising that the word "water" refers to Nicodemus alone, we can give effective weight to it in our Lord's dealing with him. And having done so, we can lay it aside in restating the universal condition which must be complied with. We can read it simply as, "Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

It is the plain and definite declaration of a truth which lays the hopes of men in the dust and yet bestows upon them a surety such as they never had before. The new life descends from above, and arises out of the action of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men. The children of the Kingdom are "born not of bloods, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God" (John 1¹³). The threefold negation is complete. No man receives the blessing or is excluded from it because the blood of a particular tribe or nation flows or does not flow in his veins. It is not a matter of bloods. Neither can it be quickened by the will of man as man. The "flesh" is incapable of producing it. By the limits of its nature the "will of flesh" is powerless in this sphere. So also is the will of any

individual, however great and good he may be. The children of the second birth are not begotten by the "will of a man." They are begotten of God alone. The life flows from a source above and beyond us.

"A touch divine—
And the sealed eyeball owns the mystic rod,
Visibly through His garden walketh God."¹

The incapacity and disorder of the life of man are now to be provided for and changed by the working of the gracious power of God. The finger of God is to be laid upon the burden and misery of men. What man "could not do because of the weakness of the flesh" is to be done through the union of God with man. The "new man is a secret combination of things earthly and heavenly"; "not discordant" do they "flow together making life musical."

But how close and personal are the lessons which we may learn from our Lord's treatment of Nicodemus! He had lost a great opportunity in resisting the teaching of John. The "way of the Lord" would have been prepared in his heart had he listened to the desert preacher. He would not now have been sitting bewildered and amazed at the teaching

¹ R. Browning, *Sordello*.

of Jesus. Neglect of light and truth is always punished. "Every duty we omit obscures some truth we should have known."¹ As one of Browning's characters says—

"I see a duty and do it not, therefore I see no higher."

We must be faithful to the light which comes to us, if we would be ready for the greater light when it arises.

"Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are."

We can never tell how much we lose by unfaithfulness to the truths which touch the conscience or to the light which shows the way of duty.

The demands from which we shrink or which we refuse are not always done with when we turn away from them. They meet us again. The sin we know, the duty we have neglected, the right which we have disobeyed, present themselves to us again. They have to be confessed, performed, obeyed, before we can enter the kingdom of life and peace.

¹ Ruskin.

VII
THE TWO ORDERS OF LIFE

"A spark disturbs our clod."—R. BROWNING.

"When shall we lay
The ghost of the brute that is walking and haunting us yet
and be free?"—TENNYSON.

"It is a significant fact that no one has ever brought such an accusation (of healing the hurt of man slightly) against the greatest optimist the world has ever seen, and the reason seems to be that in the life and death of Jesus, the consciousness of suffering and evil, not as a far-off subject of reflexion, but as an immediate and personal experience, is raised to the highest conceivable point of intensity.—PROF. E. CAIRD, *Evolution of Religion*.

"Take all in a word ; the truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace on our own impressed :
Though He is bright and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him."
R. BROWNING.

"Grace does not destroy nature ; it perfects it."
THOMAS AQUINAS.

"Two souls, alas ! are lodged within my breast,
Which struggle there for undivided reign.
One to the world, with obstinate desire
And closely cleaving organs, still adheres ;
Above the mist the other doth aspire
With sacred vehemence to purer spheres."
GOETHE, *Faust*.

"The visions of the Kingdom of God are everywhere, for man carries them in his own breast."—RENAN, *Vie de Jésus*.

CHAPTER VII

THE TWO ORDERS OF LIFE

IN the brief and much compressed report of the interview between our Lord and Nicodemus, it is only the most important parts of the conversation which are recorded. The links of connection are not always expressed, but they can be recognised without much difficulty. The declaration that a birth from above was necessary before anyone could enter the Kingdom of God, had come to Nicodemus as a great surprise. It had never occurred to him that an experience of this kind would be required at least from a Jew, or from such a good Jew as he was. In his better moments he may have admitted that the preaching of John the Baptist, insisting on the need of repentance as a preparation for the Kingdom, was seasonable and right, if not for him and his class, at least for the general body of the people. He had never expected that the peculiar privileges and pretensions of the

Jewish people would be so absolutely overlooked. In surprise he had asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?" But behind that question there was another, which was not expressed or recorded, namely, "Why was such a change necessary?" The idea conflicted with all his conceptions both of the Kingdom of God and the nature of man. It was a stumbling-block which had to be removed before anything was said as to the means or methods by which the birth from above could be brought about. Our Lord is dealing with it when He said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

The question which lay behind the surprise of Nicodemus is one which still persists. It is the difficulty which constantly arises in the minds of men in connection with the doctrine of the birth from above. It involves a conception of the nature and possibilities of man which is not readily or generally recognised. The place and power of repentance in moral endeavour, the necessity of exercising the will, the helpfulness of moral suasion, and the like, are the commonplaces of ethical teaching. Self-improvement, self-development, self-restraint are presented as sufficient. Culture and education have been praised as infallible

aids in the moral progress of mankind. Evolution has uttered its faint hope that in the long conflict of the ages the world may become better. But from Christ alone has come the austere demand for a new beginning of life from above if men are to enter into the kingdom of goodness which is the Kingdom of God. There are, He says, two orders of life : the natural, which is born of the flesh ; and the spiritual, which is born of the Spirit. The distinction is drawn with surprising clearness and force. In the Old Testament there are rudimentary indications of it, but nowhere is the line of separation marked with such sharpness and severity. Human nature has been subjected to a new analysis. "The measure of a man" has been freshly made. The elements, limits, and possibilities of his nature have been described anew. In the vital distinction which our Lord makes, He may be said to have struck a deeper note of pessimism than was ever heard in the world before. He takes away all hope of moral victory and achievement from man as man. He lays bare the essential incapacity of attainment under which he struggles. He finds the secret of failure not in man's environment or education, but in his nature. The words are true which say, "Thy nature is thy

doom.”¹ The note of pessimism is, however, only the prelude of triumphant optimism. The discovery of the source of man’s incapacity is the necessary preparation for the revelation of the means of help and healing by which it is to be overcome. Man is humbled to the dust of his own poverty that he may be raised into heavenly relations by the loving grace of God.

The terms in which the distinction is expressed are capable of clear though not complete explanation. “That which is born of the flesh” is the life of man that passes on from generation to generation. It describes him as a child of earth and time, as “a self-conscious, personal, rational, and moral being.” The qualities, capacities, and limits of the nature which he possesses are all determined by the order of life to which it belongs. Broadly speaking, “that which is born of the flesh” is the natural, worldly life of man. In this context “flesh” is not to be thought of as sinful, but as natural. It is the defect of the flesh rather than its infection with sin which is emphasised. It is used in the same sense as where it is said, “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,” and “what God has” thus “cleansed” we must not call unclean.

¹ Lowell, *Prometheus*.

But while it is the inability of the flesh which is emphasised, it is not from inability or defect alone that man has to be saved. The "works of the flesh" have degraded the flesh. Sin has defaced and soiled it. Christ has to redeem the flesh from the bondage of corruption. He has to deal with it not as it came from the hand of God, but as it has been wasted, weakened, and bound in the hand of man. "That which is born of the flesh" has made itself the slave of "Will and Pride and Appetite, the unregenerate trinity of evil," and has added their chains to its own inherent incapacity.

"That which is born of the Spirit" is not so easily described, for our words "are of the earth earthy," and the Spirit is from heaven. As the distinctive quality of the one order of life is "flesh," so the distinctive quality of the other is "spirit." It is born from above. It partakes "of the Divine nature," for God is the Author of this new life in man. The method of its quickening is inscrutable. We can only say that it is through the uniting of the Spirit of God with the soul of man that the new conditions and relations are created out of which the life arises and in which it is maintained and developed. We may describe it as the addition of a new dynamic, the reception

of a new principle of life, the loss of self-will in the vision of the will of God, but all our efforts to explain it are futile. Even the physical life has its hidden processes, and we need not be perplexed if the spiritual life is shrouded behind the same impenetrable veils.¹ This we know, that it is the life of the Kingdom of God. Its characteristic features are described in the Beatitudes. Sense and self are not its guides and law, and the death of the flesh is not its death. To please God is its conscious and happy aim. His law is its delight. "The fruit of" it "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Since, then, the life of the Kingdom is spiritual, and the flesh can only produce flesh, there is no room for surprise at the saying, "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

These two orders of life are distinct the one from the other. They are "for ever separate, yet for ever near," until they are united in the spiritual man. Each is ruled by the law of its own order. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." "Like begets like." "Such

¹ "It is a mystery we can give no account of, but no more can we of the springing of the seed for that matter."—*Adam Bede*.

as we are made of such we be." The spirit is not an evolution of the flesh. The flesh does not "move upward, working out the beast." By no potency that is in the flesh can it become spirit. "Once for all," as Rothe says, "spirit cannot possibly be made."

But while flesh and spirit are so distinct, and the one order of life so separate from the other, we must not fall into the grave error of imagining that they have no affinity with each other. It is possible so to emphasise their distinction that a dark and bridgeless gulf may seem to lie between them. But it is not so. "The supernatural is not anti-natural"; the Spirit is not alien to Humanity. Man is the heir of two worlds. "The light of the stars is on his brow, but the dust of the earth cleaves to his feet." He has been born into this world that he may be born from above. When the Spirit comes to the flesh He comes "to His own," since man was made in the image of God.

"Held our eyes no sunny sheen,
How could God's own light be seen?
Dwelt no power divine within us—
How could God's divineness win us?"

Both flesh and spirit give indications that they are intended for each other. On the

side of the flesh its affinity with the spirit is indicated (1) by its sense of incompleteness. All that the world can give to man leaves him empty and dissatisfied. There is a something still which prompts the eternal sigh, and "the king sighs as often as the peasant." "The world is our country, yet in every land we are exiles."¹ The cry of the Roman Emperor, "I have been all things, and nothing serves" (*Omnia fui et nihil expedit*),² stands as the confession of one who had the opportunity of getting all that the world can provide. The Book of Ecclesiastes is a long-drawn wail of the hungry soul of man at the full table of the world's dainties. The flesh is conscious of its incompleteness. It has a "devotion to something afar."

"Even in savage bosoms
There are longings, strivings, yearnings
For the good they comprehend not."

In its sense of want the soul bears witness to a reality which is above and beyond it, which it is powerless to reach. It says—

"There is a door to which I find no key,
There is a veil past which I cannot see."³

¹ J. O. Hobbes, *School for Saints*.

² Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. vi.

³ Omar Khayyám, *Rubáiyát*.

(2) Deeper than the sense of incompleteness is the sense of sin. Life is not only empty, it is wrong. Conscience in its judgment of the act of sin declares that something has been done which is contrary to the real life of man. A deep sense of sin is the peculiar possession of man; conscience sets him apart. "The beasts of the field do not lie awake in the night and weep for their sins."¹ And it is not only sins, but sin which burdens man. "Sold under sin," is the cry of the captive conscious of his chain. In our truer moments we feel as if self were sin and sin were self, and say—

"But who shall wall
Self from myself, most loathed of all?
If I could once lay down myself
And start self-purged upon the race
Which all must run."²

A creature designed only for the life of the flesh or the life of this world would not be endowed with instincts, longings, sorrows like these. If we read aright this dark and pressing mystery, it is really the glory and hope of the race. "Man's misery comes of his greatness." It is the sign that he is not what he ought to be, an "intimation" that he was intended for something higher.

¹ Walt Whitman.

² Christina Rossetti.

(3) It is when the life of man approaches most nearly to the life of the Spirit that that life is at its noblest. The love of truth, purity, and goodness, the disposition and practice of kindness, give to the natural man a true and high nobility. We see that at his best he is not far from the Kingdom of God. Then also the sense of incompleteness and dissatisfaction is most keen, the yearnings and strivings for something better are most strongly felt, and the "visionary hours" come oftenest. These "pulses of nobleness and aches of shame" which point man upwards are facts of great significance. For, on the other hand, when the flesh is indulged at the prompting of its lower passions, and the natural life is spent in sordidness and sin, the character becomes degraded. The life is far, very far, from the Kingdom. It is a dark abyss into which men may sink, especially when light is despised, and knowledge of better things is wilfully slighted or disobeyed. Where the life is farthest away from the life of the Spirit, there also the unrest of the soul is at its least, and the yearnings after higher things are at their weakest. The natural man at his best is nearest the Kingdom of God and at his worst is farthest away from it. Both the nearness and the distance are

“intimations” of a connection, a relation, or affinity with that to which it approaches and from which it recedes.

(4) Perhaps the strongest intimation of an affinity of the flesh with the Spirit is to be found in the universal consciousness of God. “The more carefully facts have been examined, the more narrowly the history of religions has been scrutinised, the clearer has it become that underlying all the particular ideas men have of their deities—underlying their particular acts of worship to them—there is always this sense of something mysterious, intangible, infinite—of an all-pervading supernatural Presence and Power—which is not identified with any particular phenomena of nature, but is regarded as manifested through them.”¹ Not only is there the recognition of the Being of God, but there is a consciousness of relation to Him. In the rudest as in the highest forms of worship there is expressed the universal feeling of the heart of man that “it is with Him we have to do.” These certainties of the human race are not the result of reasoning. They are instinctive ideas, prompting men “to seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us.”

¹ Orr's *Christian View of God and the World*, p. 127.

(5) In addition to these grounds of hope, we must emphasise as facts which point in the same direction, man's sense of death and hope of immortality. These are peculiar to humanity. Man alone knows that he belongs to a world in which all things change and pass. He sees that it is "dark with grief and graves"; he foresees death as an experience which he must meet. Only on his little life has the "fear of death" cast its awful shadow. Man stands apart from all other sentient creatures in his consciousness of an "end," in his recognition of the certainty and inevitableness of death. Not only so, but there is an element of hostility in the feelings with which he looks upon it. He names it "King of Terrors," the "Last Enemy"; thinks of it as alien to his life; struggles with all his skill and strength to resist its approach. Surely there must be something more than "nature" in the creature who thus rebels against the "law of nature"? Not only does he so rebel against this law, but he rises above it, and looks beyond the "end" which it ordains, and cherishes dreams and hopes of life that shall be after death. In the graves of the rudest tribes of humankind there are tokens, laid beside the dead, which bear pathetic but convincing witness to instincts and longings which are native to humanity.

The degraded savage, while acknowledging the irresistible power of death, buried with its victim the signs of his defiance, and intrusted to the sure keeping of the grave the symbols of his hope. When man in ignorance and darkness acted thus, may we not say that he claimed to belong to another kingdom than that over which death reigns?

If these are indications from the experience of the flesh that the two orders of life are in affinity, there are also signs and hints on the side of the Spirit.

(1) The "fruit" of the Spirit is strangely like the virtues of the natural man. "Human courage, patience, trustiness, humility—these, filled with the fire of God, make the graces of the Christian life. . . . The Christian graces are nothing but the natural virtues held up into the light of Christ. They are made of the same stuff; they are lifted along the same lines, but they have reached their pinnacle."¹ The buds have bloomed to "flowers that never will in other climate grow." The fruit has ripened to a new sweetness. The virtues have been transfigured into graces. They are the same, but perfected. They are arranged in a new order of excellence, and others are added—

¹ Phillips Brooks, *Light of the World*, p. 8.

like humility and forgiveness and patience under wrong—such as the flesh did not know or recognise. It is an impossible task to mark the point at which the natural virtue becomes the grace of the Spirit,¹ but their likeness is a fact to be gladly and hopefully recognised.

(2) There must be an affinity of flesh with Spirit, or it never could have happened that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Incarnation of Jesus Christ is the supreme and all-sufficient “intimation” that the gulf between the natural and the spiritual has been bridged. However clearly we may state the vast, deep truth that “that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” the possibility of communication between them is made sure by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is an assurance that

“There must be a higher gate,
There must be somewhere a hidden door,
Where tidings come in from the heavenly shore.”²

(3) The fact also that the Kingdom is intended for man involves the corresponding

¹ “Oh the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!”

R. BROWNING.

² Dr. George Matheson, *The Secret*.

fact that man is intended for the Kingdom. As the eye is for light and the ear for sound, so the soul of man is for life eternal. If it were not so, the gospel could not be preached, nor could any kind of birth or experience enable him to enter into the Kingdom which it proclaims. Therefore we come to this glad and certain conclusion, which cheers our hearts amid all the defects and limitations of the flesh, that it has been created for the Spirit. Strive however mightily, it cannot pass the invisible barriers by which it is confined, but the Spirit can stoop to enter into union with it. The innate and innocent need of the flesh is met by the grace of God in the gift and work of His Spirit. "I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love flowed over the ocean of darkness."¹ If it were not so, the creature might say to the Creator, "Why hast Thou made me thus?" But since it is so we can say with peace and hope—

"My want is God's desire to give—He yearns
To add Himself to life, and so for aye
Make it enough."²

¹ George Fox's *Journal*.

² Jean Ingelow.

VIII

THE SPIRIT AND THE SPIRIT-BORN

"It isn't for men to make channels for God's Spirit as they make channels for the watercourses, and say, 'Flow here, but flow not there.'"

GEORGE ELIOT.

"So I may Thy Spirit know,
Let Him as He listeth blow ;
Let the manner be unknown,
So I may with Thee be one."

"God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame."

E. B. BROWNING.

"Thou hast given me a heart to desire,
Thou hast given me a soul to aspire,
A spirit to question and plead ;
I ask not what Thou hast decreed ;
I think but of love and of need ;
Thou art rich, Thou art kind, Thou art free ;
What joy shall be failing to me
Whom Thou lovest? Thy smile and Thy kiss
Can give me back all that I miss,
In Thy presence is fulness of bliss :
I ask not its nature ! I know
It is life, it is youth, it is love,
It is all that is wanting below,
It is all that is waiting above.

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Thy hand
Is full, and I open my breast
For the flower of my soul to expand.

DORA GREENWELL, *Carmina Crucis*.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPIRIT AND THE SPIRIT-BORN

“MARVEL not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above. The Spirit breatheth where He willeth, and thou hearest His Voice, but canst not tell whence He cometh and whither He goeth; so is every one that is (has been) born of the Spirit” (John 3^{7,8}). This translation is strange and unfamiliar to those who read only the English versions of the New Testament.¹ There is, however, not the slightest doubt but that it is the literal translation. If we were not accustomed to the form in which the verse appears in the Authorised Version, and had only the Greek before us, this is how it would be read: “The Spirit breatheth where He willeth,” etc. The familiar translation most likely arose from the intense desire to find at this stage of the conversation some indication as to the means or method by which the birth from above is to

¹ Note H.

be brought about. It is supposed to give a parabolic illustration of the operation of the Spirit in communicating the new life. But it is remarkable to notice how little light it casts on this momentous subject when taken in this way. What do we learn about the beginning of spiritual life when we read the words, as if Jesus had said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth"? We may learn that the Spirit, like the wind, is beyond our control; that we may be conscious of His appeal to us, and that His movements are mysterious. But these things help us little. We are as ignorant of the way in which spiritual life is imparted as we were before. The literal translation is best, because it is literal, and also because it provides the most helpful teaching.

Our Lord is not referring to the beginning of the life from above. He is still dealing with the surprise of Nicodemus. Possibly it has not been sufficiently recognised how intensely alien to all his thinking was the new conception of the Kingdom of God which Jesus had presented. His education and his occupation as a teacher had accustomed him to other ideals. They had

inwrought themselves with the very fibre of his intellectual and moral being. They were the basis of his life. As an old man, also, he had come to the time of life when new ideas are looked upon with suspicion, if not with repugnance. The new wine was being poured into an old bottle. He was "bursting" with amazement as he listened to Jesus. It seems as if he had misread all that he had heard of the Kingdom, interpreting everything in the line of his own well-established convictions. It was the necessity of the birth from above which bewildered him. He had thought that, as the Kingdom was a Jewish hope, the Jews had only to await its coming. The passion of the Zealots was only the froth and fume of a national enthusiasm arising out of hopes and expectations which were cherished as warmly by the more cautious leaders of the people. We must never forget that it was because the leaders soon perceived that the teaching of Jesus was subversive of these national hopes, that they so quickly took up the attitude of opposition to Him. By and by the people saw it too, and the tragedy of the Cross became inevitable. The teaching of Jesus was only welcomed while it was misunderstood. But when face to face with Him in private converse, misunderstanding was no

longer possible. The shock of surprise which Nicodemus received is an illustration of the experience of others, who had not his deep personal respect for the new Teacher, as the real intent and end of His teaching became apparent. The thought of the Kingdom of God as a spiritual entity, to be entered by a spiritual experience, was entirely revolutionary. The necessity of the birth from above had to be further enforced. The statement of the fact of the two orders of life was not enough. The character of the life which was born from above—that is, of the life of the Kingdom—had to be described. In the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord had revealed to the common people the qualities and characteristics of the citizens of the Kingdom, but He describes them in another and a more essential way to this experienced sage of Israel. He shows him more clearly why the birth from above was necessary. It was because the life of the Kingdom was so unworldly, so pure and lofty. The flesh could not produce it, for *it is a life which resembles the life of the Spirit*. The comparison which Jesus makes in verse 8 is not between the movements of the wind and the operations of the Spirit; it is between the Spirit and the Spirit-born. The

characteristics of the Spirit are to reappear in them, for "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

The declaration of this great principle, whatever other effect it may have had on the mind of Nicodemus, would conclusively establish the unworldly character of the Kingdom of which Jesus was speaking, and the absolute necessity of the birth from above. "Nature," "man," "the flesh," could have no standing here ; the birth must be of God, since the life was to be God-like.

The significance of the revelation of this principle of the life of the Kingdom has been hidden from those who are content with the interpretation of verse 8, which finds that the comparison is made between the Spirit and the movements of the wind. When once it is seen that the comparison is made between the Spirit and the life which the Spirit quickens, we are in the presence of a most solemn and impressive fact. It is a familiar idea that the Christian life is to be one of Christ-likeness, but even though the law of the higher order of life which Jesus laid down with such clearness and emphasis, expresses the truth, it has not been generally recognised that the spiritual man is to resemble the Spirit. As is the Spirit, such are they also that are of the Spirit.

The comparison has been so much neglected that it has the appearance of novelty, and the lines of likeness can only be traced with hesitation.

(1) "The Spirit breathes where He will." In the most absolute sense His movements are free. He does not act from caprice or under the compulsion of another power. His operations are governed by His own will. We have still to say, "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counsellor hath taught Him?" If there is in the very name of the Spirit (*πνεῦμα*, רִיחַ) a reference to the underlying figure of breath or wind, the unrestrained liberty of the wind is to be taken as an illustration of the liberty wherewith the Spirit moves. "Free as the wind," however, is only a poor earthly analogue of the freedom of the Spirit, for it is not uncertain or capricious, but is an attribute of His will, which is holy; and is in accordance with His character, which is the character of God. In the largest, fullest sense, the Spirit is free.

(2) "Thou hearest His voice." The breath of the Spirit in its movement becomes the voice of the Spirit. His action is recognisable. He has a power of influence or of communication. Even if the phrase was originally suggested by the sound of the wind, it must be read as

The Spirit and the Spirit-Born I I I

referring to the voice of the Spirit, and interpreted in the line of spiritual analogy. We "hear what the Spirit saith" in the suggestions which quicken pure desires, holy aspirations, and right decisions. He speaks directly to the souls of men, leaving none without His witness. "Great thoughts, great feelings come to us like instincts unawares." It is

"His that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault and calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven."

(3) "Thou knowest not whence He cometh, and whither He goeth." His movements are hidden. Mystery broods over all His ways. We cannot trace His outgoing or His incoming. We can only say that "He proceedeth from the Father and the Son," and leads us home to God. He is

"The Something which we name and cannot know,
Even as we name a star, and only see
His quenchless flashings forth, which ever show
And ever hide him, but which are not he."¹

These characteristics are to reappear in the Spirit-born, for "so is every one that is (has been) born of the Spirit." (1) Freedom is their birthright. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is,

¹ Watson, *Wordsworth's Grave*.

there is liberty." The life of the Kingdom of God has liberty as its first and distinctive note. It is not too much to say that liberty was born into the world with the coming of the Spirit of God. The freedom which all men dream of and desire is only found within the Kingdom, where He "breathes." Rules and laws are needless, since the controlling power is delight in the will of God. The Spirit witnesses with our spirit what is to be done or left undone. Before His presence the iron chains of heredity and habit are broken. Environment cannot confine the spiritual man. "The breath of life" is a breath of liberty. Political powers, like that of Rome, may play the tyrant, but their pains and penalties can never "tame the children of the second birth." The liberty of the Spirit is liberty of soul. The real centre of life has been determined, and the circumference in which it moves has been enlarged. Thought itself is freed from "error's chains." The mind "attains to a steadiness of insight, a quiet decision, a strength against perplexity, which sometimes stand in strange contrast with the vacillation and mistakes of natural ability."¹ The days have come in which the promise of the new covenant has been fulfilled. The law of God

¹ Paget, *Spirit of Discipline*, p. 109.

is written on the heart. It is a perfect law, and is found to be "a law of liberty."

(2) The spiritual man is also endowed with a power of manifestation and of influence. "A holy life is a voice."¹ It reveals its presence in the world. Men take knowledge of the Spirit-born. They cannot be hid. They are "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." As the flower reveals itself by its fragrance, so the life that is quickened by the Spirit of God reveals itself by its holy influences. It appeals to the lives of others; it "speaks" to them, awakening such feelings and emotions as are quickened by the Holy Spirit. We must, however, remember that the manifestation and effect of the life of the children of the Spirit is dependent on the strength of their life. There are some who are "weak and sickly," whose relation to the Kingdom of God can scarcely be perceived, and from whom there is little or no "going forth" of spiritual influence. But there are others whose very presence is a benediction, in whom and through whom the Spirit of goodness is manifestly working. It is by them that He carries on His work of conviction in the world, and reveals the things of Christ for His glory. The witnesses of Christ are those who

¹ James Hinton.

have received "power," through the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. It is the Spirit's work to fill the world with voices that speak of hope and grace and goodness to the sinner.

(3) The life of the Spirit-born is also a hidden life. No one sees its beginning, marks its process of growth, or beholds its end. Its fellowship with God in ways the feet have never trod, its walk with Christ in the Word and in the world, the secrets of its inspirations, its hopes and struggles, its victories and destiny, are hidden—"hid with Christ in God." The haven of rest in which it finds the "peace which passeth understanding" is the secret place of the Most High. The fountain of its freshness is in the eternal hills. The impulse of its sacrifices and the strength of its endurance are in the Cross of Calvary. Oftentimes its actions are misjudged: meekness is despised as cowardice, forgiveness as weakness, faith as superstition. "The world knoweth us not, even as it knew Him not." So, too, its end is out of sight. The body "returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it."

"He that hath found some fledg'd bird's nest may know
At first sight if the bird be flown;
But what fair dell or grove he sings in now,
That is to him unknown."¹

¹ Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans* [Departed Friends].

Even to the spiritual man, his life is largely one of mystery. He cannot always tell how or when the Spirit came to him or comes to him. Nor does he "know what he shall be." As Amiel says, "What is most precious in us never shows itself; only part of it reaches our consciousness. We ourselves, when all is said, remain outside our own mystery."¹

"We cannot kindle when we will
The fire that in the heart resides;
The Spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery the soul abides."²

These qualities of the Spirit, which we faintly trace or recognise with difficulty in the life of the professing Christian, are easily seen in Christ, the first-born of the Spirit. "He first discovered man's true relation to God, and lived it."³ In Him we find the largest freedom, the greatest distinctness of spiritual character and influence, and the greatest depths of mystery. His life is still the secret of the ages, whose veil no man hath lifted. As we think of the life of Jesus, we find that it can be described in no more essential way. There never was a life so free.

¹ *Journal Intime*, vol. i. p. 103.

² Matthew Arnold, *Morality*.

³ E. Caird, *Evolution of Religion*, vol. ii. p. 140.

He moved at the dictates of His own will; He alone has overcome the world. There never was a life that "said" so much, or that has moved the world so deeply and universally. There never was a life so beyond the knowledge of men in its origin and end. It has all "the hiddenness of perfect things."¹ As we see that these are the distinctive marks of the life of Jesus, we recognise the appropriateness of their application to those who are His followers. The law is universally true—"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

But while the comparison is between the Spirit and the Spirit-born, we must not overlook the knowledge regarding the Holy Spirit which is imparted in it, especially in what it suggests in relation to the beginning of the life from above in the soul of man. That life is dependent on His action. But what comfort and hope come to us when we know that "He breathes where He wills"! There is no caprice or uncertainty about His movements. The character of God the Spirit is behind His will. Therefore the highest wisdom and the widest mercy guide His actions. The sphere and time of His "breathing" are confined by no limit but that of His own glorious

¹ Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*.

and gracious will. And His will is as essentially a will to save as is that of the Father or the Son. This revelation of the will of the Spirit is part of the good news of the gospel, and it opens wide the door of hope and fills the soul with joy unspeakable. The movements of the Spirit, like the grace of God of which they form part, anticipate the desires and thoughts of men. Our aspirations arise from His inspirations. Our highest hopes and purest emotions are "but the spray flung up from hidden tides, that follow a moon no eye can see."¹ "Everywhere we see the shining footprints, but nowhere do we catch a glimpse of the glowing feet." The Spirit "has left no one without a witness," shuts out no one from His quickening power. Just as no sinner can have a stronger desire to be saved than Christ has to save him, so no one can have deeper yearnings for spiritual life than the Spirit has to impart it. "The creature" cannot "surpass the Creator," and it is with the Creator of spiritual life in the fulness and grace of His wise and merciful will, that we have to do in this matter. The instinct which seeks the higher life is implanted and aroused and satisfied by Him, nay, it is implanted, aroused, that it may be

¹ Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil*.

satisfied by Him. We do not even need to "tarry" for the Spirit. The gospel gives us boldness to say that He tarries, waits for us.

"Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit
can meet ;
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands or
feet."¹

The quickening and development of spiritual life now depend on the responsiveness of the soul of man to the power that broods over him with the desire to bless. Life is a gift which we have to receive. We become new creatures when we yield to the Spirit "that waits to combine with us," the Power

"Which comes and goes unseen,
Yet doth effect
Rare issues by its operance."

¹ Tennyson, *Higher Pantheism*.

IX
THE TWOFOLD SURPRISE

"It is Christianity or nothing that can meet the needs of men."—GEORGE J. ROMANES.

"Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures."

"They are they which testify of Me."

"A man can only understand that of which he has already the beginnings in himself."—AMIEL.

CHAPTER IX

THE TWOFOLD SURPRISE

WHATEVER were the thoughts of Nicodemus as he sought the presence of Jesus, it is certain that the interview took a course which he had never imagined. Possibly there may have been some expectation that he would be welcomed with eagerness, and that all he had to say would be listened to with the utmost deference. Perhaps he thought that he would be the leader in the conversation, and that it would be the errors and misconceptions natural to a young Teacher which he, out of his long and ripe experience, would have to set right. But from the first the conversation was taken out of his hands. It took a course which he could not control, which indeed he could not follow. He was surprised at every turn. He, "the teacher of Israel," had nothing to say but "How?" "How can these things be?" The "Kingdom of God" that had been so clear and certain to his mind faded away. Messianic

ideals, Jewish privileges, the glory of the Law, the promise to the seed of Abraham, social reforms, the times and means and methods of their accomplishments, are not even mentioned, are all passed by as if they had never been. The new teacher has nothing to say about them. The themes on which Nicodemus had taught for a lifetime, the hopes which he had cherished and encouraged others to hold, are ignored. In spite of himself, he is led away from the familiar ground of Pharisaic patriotism, and is introduced to a "Kingdom of God" which is entirely strange to him. The phrase is the same, its content is altogether new. This "Kingdom" looms before him vaguely, indistinctly; it was as a foreign land. It seems unreal, fantastic, absurd, and yet he cannot end the conversation and go away from the presence of Jesus. Up till that night he had been an unquestioned authority on all matters relating to the hope of Israel. His opinions had become settled convictions. They were no doubt buttressed with many a citation from rabbinical lore. Jesus is traversing the very principles on which the teaching of his life was founded. He is setting aside the national hopes which were the very breath of his life as a Jew, and yet

Nicodemus does not break off from Him in haughty scorn. Away in Jerusalem, surrounded with his friends and pupils, it might have been possible to make light of the teaching of Jesus, but sitting near Him, looking into His eyes, hearing the tones of His voice, it was impossible to do so. The personality of the new Teacher holds him. The evident sincerity and certainty with which the amazing utterances were made, the spiritual authority which breathed through them, bound him as with a spell. With any other he would most likely have ended the interview abruptly and returned to Jerusalem, thinking that he had wasted his time, and saying to his associates that Jesus of Nazareth was one about whom they need not trouble themselves. But in the presence of Jesus he forgets his official position and his proud authority. He is as a child in his amazement, saying, "How?" "How can these things be?"

One cannot but respect the honesty and humility of this old teacher of Israel. He might have held his peace and gone away without revealing the extent of his ignorance, and said as others said afterwards, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" Although he is confused and bewildered, there is no feeling of impatience or repulsion. Uncon-

sciously his question reveals not only his ignorance, but also his sincerity, humility, and tenacity. George Eliot in early life found herself face to face with some difficulties which she could not solve, and came to the conclusion that because she could not solve them they were insoluble. Therefore she turned away from Christ. Nicodemus had none of that intellectual conceit or impatience. He can wait for further light even though he is overwhelmed with surprise. There is infinite hope for such a man.

One other surprise awaited him, which was without doubt the greatest that came to him that night. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and knowest not these things?" It was the last question in the world that he could have expected. Accused of ignorance!—he who was the "Wise Man of the Sanhedrin," who was known as "the teacher of Israel"! From any other, the question would have been a bitter insult. But the calm, pitying look of surprise, the tone of sincerity and wonder, quickened no feeling of resentment within him. He was silenced, humbled, shamed at the revelation of the surprise of Jesus. He was convinced of his own ignorance. He saw that Jesus had expected him to understand what had

been said, and that his failure to do so had amazed Him. The surprise was real. Jesus had thought that in Nicodemus He would have a listener to whom He could speak plainly. This wise old teacher would surely understand Him better than the people, better even than His disciples. He would speak to him without reserve of the work He had come to do. That is what He had done, and lo! there was the grossest ignorance. It was a disappointment as well as a surprise. This leader of the people was a blind guide.

The things which Nicodemus should have known were the spiritual character of the Kingdom of God, and the inherent necessity of new life being quickened in the individual by the Spirit of God. As a student of law and prophecy, Nicodemus should have been familiar with these simple spiritual principles. We cannot accurately specify all the sources of information which were within his reach; but at least he had the Scriptures of the Old Testament—Scriptures which were the glory of his race, which he also must have studied as a teacher of Israel. It is possible that we may be unfair to Nicodemus in estimating the knowledge that he might have gained from them. We read the Old Testament with other eyes and in fuller light than he did.

Interpretations which seem to us to lie on the surface may have been invisible to him. We must never forget the words of Augustine, that "the Old Testament is revealed in the New."

Then, also, it is only the greatest minds which are free from the limitations of the age to which they belong. There are fashions in thinking as well as in dress. Certain ideas or truths become popular for a time, and others are obscured. The Reformation and the Renaissance were not due to the discovery of truths which were new. They were the outcome of forgotten principles and of old learning that had come to light again. Luther appealed to the Scriptures of which the mediæval Church was the custodian and interpreter. Our Lord appealed to the Law and the Prophets. He *had* new things to declare, but, so far as the conversation had gone, He assumes that nothing had been said which should not have been "known" to a man in the position of Nicodemus. The people might be ignorant of the spiritual character of the Kingdom of God, but "the teacher of Israel" should have had knowledge. This was his fault, his sin, that as a teacher he did not know the things which he should have known. He had been mastered by the

popular expectation of earthly prosperity and worldly glory under the reign of the Messiah. Instead of leading the people he had been led by them. Our Lord's question was the condemnation not only of the man who was before Him and of the men whom he represented, but is pregnant with warning to the teachers of all time. Whatever else they do not know, they should be masters of the subject which they are called to teach.

To Jesus the history of the Jewish people was a preparation for the kingdom He had come to establish. He built upon the Law and the Prophets. Looking at them broadly, laying stress only on their outstanding features and tendencies, can we see any justification of the surprise of our Lord at the ignorance of Nicodemus?

(1) As a student of the Law, Nicodemus should have been ready to accept the declaration, "Ye *must* be born from above." It was not Paul alone who found that by "the law was the knowledge of sin." The whole Jewish race was affected by it. It gave to them a peculiar consciousness of sin. It was only a Jew who could say, "My sin is ever before me." The elaborate rules of the Jewish life regarding things "clean and unclean" helped to deepen and at the same time tended to

pervert this unique consciousness of sin. It distinguished them from the other races of the world. The Greek, with his "healthy animalism," had little of it; the Roman, with his absorption in the practical affairs of life, had even less. We search elsewhere in vain for such confessions of sin as are breathed out in the Psalms. It was the Law as the expression of the will of a holy God which in the course of time created in the Jewish people this deep sense of guilt and failure. It revealed what was right and what was wrong, but it did not provide the power by which the right could be done and the wrong left undone. "It condemned them to an impossible ideal." The rich young man in his youthful inexperience of life might say, "All these things have I kept from my youth," but a sage like Nicodemus should have known better. Added to the Law and working on the same lines was the sacrificial ritual of the Temple. It was based on human failure. It was an elaborate confession of sin, an inarticulate daily prayer for pardon and help from above. The Law might be made of none effect by tradition or blunted by casuistical subtleties; the significance of the Temple ritual might be obscured by formalism, but a teacher of the people of the position and experience of Nicodemus

should not have been so blind to their essential spiritual lessons regarding human need. His ignorance condemned him.

(2) The teaching of the prophets should also have kept him from surprise at the declaration of the necessity of the birth from above, and prepared him to expect a fuller revelation of the grace and power of God. The prophets always interpreted the law morally, and worship or sacrifice spiritually. The promises of future good which they made in such abundance, and which are so instinct with undying beauty and grace, are invariably conditioned by repentance and associated with personal holiness. To these great teachers of the race the one unchanging ground of hope lay in the assurance of the gracious working of the power or Spirit of God. In their speech for Him they unite in declaring, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thy help" (Hos. 13⁹). These are the great characteristics which are written at large on every page of the prophetic writings. They are especially prominent in the writings of Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel. ("I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely"—Hos. 14⁴; "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun as . . . of seven days, in the day

when the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people, and healeth the stroke of their wound"—Isa. 30²⁶; "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Jacob"—Jer. 31³¹; "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean . . . a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh"—Ezek. 36^{25,26}; "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh"—Joel 2²⁸.) The Old Testament is pervaded with assurances of the grace and help of God. The wonder is that any teacher or student of prophetic writings should miss the significance of this outstanding characteristic. We say this while we admit that we may read something of the higher conceptions of the New Testament into the Old Testament references to the Spirit of God. In the Old Testament "Spirit of God" is best interpreted as a name for the power or grace of God acting on men and in the world, but even with all allowance for these things, it is surprising that Nicodemus should be so far out of touch with the assurances of God's help that he should wonder at the words of Jesus. It was from the prophetic writings that he and

other Jews derived their hopes of a Messianic kingdom. The common people might misread or misinterpret the messages of hope, but that a teacher so prominent as Nicodemus should do so was unexpected. Again his ignorance condemned him.

(3) Neither should the emphasis upon the individual experience of regeneration have surprised Nicodemus. The prevailing idea of the time was that the nation should receive blessing from God as having descended from Abraham, His friend. The blessing was mediated through the father of the race. It had been confirmed by the law through the mediation of Moses. The individual was to receive blessing because he was a member of the favoured nation. The possibility of a direct personal relation between God and the individual was not recognised. Yet it is the great thought of Jeremiah, the burden of Ezekiel, and the peculiar distinction of the Psalms. The national relation with God is repeatedly transcended. The prayers and songs of the Psalmists are the proofs that the life of the soul in loving personal dependence upon God was a spiritual truth which enriched the hope of Israel. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none in all the earth whom I desire besides Thee." "Send out

Thy light and Thy truth, let them lead me.”
“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Still trust in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”
Such words as these should have given to Nicodemus readiness to understand how it was possible for “a man” to be born from above.

(4) The universal character of the new declaration which is involved in the direct personal relation between God and the individual, and the ignoring of the special privileges of the Jews, are also quite in accordance with the general tendencies of prophetic promise. The promise given to Abraham indicated a universal blessing—
“In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” The trend of prophetic teaching is true to this initial principle of Israel’s hope. Reference to it is not so frequent or so general as to the other elements or principles which have been noticed above, but it is a distinct portion of the prophetic outlook and is a prominent feature of the Psalms. “In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land : whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be

Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance" (Isa. 19^{24,25}).

"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for . . . a light to the Gentiles"

(Isa. 42⁶). "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations" (Ps. 67^{1,2}).

"His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun: men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed" (Ps. 72¹⁷). We can see that the trend of Jewish history and prophecy lay clearly in the direction of universalism, that the prophetic conception of God as the only true God involved it; but Nicodemus may not have seen it. National pride and contempt of Gentiles were widely prevailing popular passions. We do not say that he was ignorant of something which he ought to have known in this particular, but only of something which he might have known. His ignorance may not have been a cause of our Lord's surprise, for the universal aspect of the kingdom which He was to establish is only involved in what He had said. It is expressed definitely at a later stage of the interview, or at least of the narrative. The ignorance of Nicodemus was

a serious and condemning fact for him, but it was more serious and significant when taken in connection with the people and rulers whom he represented. It was a symptom of the prevalence of unspiritual conceptions both of the need and the remedy. "The Light was shining in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." What was our Lord to expect from men professing to lead the people, when one who represented them manifested surprise at the teaching of such simple facts regarding the Kingdom of God as that it was spiritual in its character, was to be entered by a spiritual change in the hearts of men, and that the power by which the change was produced was that of the Spirit of God? The ignorance of Nicodemus is the prophecy and explanation of the hostility which opposed Jesus during the brief years of His ministry, and wrought out its blind and cruel will on Calvary.

X

UNBELIEF; THE CONFLICT
OF AUTHORITY

"The Sayings of the Elders are weightier than the Prophets."
Rabbinical Saying.

"Custom lies on us with a weight
Heavy as frost and deep almost as life."

"The uniqueness in the teaching of Christ is the conviction it carries to the mind. . . . His teaching strikes upon the moral nature with the force and conviction of conscience. His ideals are not beautiful pictures which interest and charm us, they are voices which summon to obedience and reproach us with failure. . . . We listen to the voice of Christ, and we seem to be hearing the voice of our own consciences speaking in clearer tones and with more winning accents the same unchangeable truths."—*The Faith of a Disciple.*

CHAPTER X

UNBELIEF; THE CONFLICT OF AUTHORITY

NICODEMUS was silenced by the evident surprise of Jesus. He sat in humility and shame before this Teacher who had "come from God," who had not hesitated to charge him, an old and revered teacher of the people, with ignorance. He knew not what to say or what was to be said to Him, but he waited to hear. Was it another shock of surprise to find that the charge of ignorance was followed by an accusation of unbelief? Not only should the sacred writings of which he was an accredited teacher have saved him from misunderstanding what had been said, but there were living voices speaking in his own day whose message could have instructed him and his fellows had they been willing to be taught. Jesus says, "We speak that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen : and ye receive not our witness." The

accusation of unbelief is broadened. It is directed not only against Nicodemus, but against the class to which he belonged. It is evident that those who had not received the testimony to which our Lord refers were the Scribes and Pharisees—the rulers and teachers of the nation. We cannot say with equal certainty whose witness it was which they had refused. It was, however, a present-day testimony, and those who were preaching at that time were John the Baptist and Jesus with their disciples. Perhaps the most likely conclusion is one which includes all of them. Jesus always associated the work of the Baptist with His own. He had more to say and do than His forerunner. He had to make a new revelation and to establish the Kingdom of God, but, so far as His work had gone, it was on the same lines as that of John. Already there were indications on the part of Jesus of a deeper reach and a higher aim, but in what both had said they were in agreement. They had declared that the Kingdom of God was at hand, that it was a spiritual kingdom, that men had to prepare for it by a true repentance, that there was no validity in the claim to be the children of Abraham, and that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was required before men could enter

into it. These were the great matters of the new preaching with which the land was ringing. They should have escaped the attention of no one, least of all the teachers of Israel. Up till now, in His conversation with Nicodemus Jesus had only said in other and fuller terms what had been said by the Jordan, among the villages of Galilee, and wherever the new preachers had spoken in and around Jerusalem. This preaching had not been without fruit. The Kingdom had come. It was "among" them, "unseen but not unknown." The publicans and the harlots were pressing into it. New lives were being lived under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. In a spiritual sense Jesus might have said, "The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and to the poor the gospel is preached." The rulers had indeed sent to make inquiries, but their inquiry was limited. They ask, "Who art Thou?" "Why baptizest Thou?" "What sign showest Thou?" The inner character of the new movement, which was stirring the life of the nation as the spring stirs the sleeping life of the earth, was ignored. They had pedantic questions to ask about authority, and were deaf to the truth which was spoken and blind to the facts of life which were evident.

Jesus is referring to things which *were* when He said, "We testify of that which we have seen." Had these truths and facts been honestly observed, there would have been no bewilderment on the part of Nicodemus at the words which he had heard from the lips of Jesus in the course of the interview. They expressed little more than the first principles and results of the new teaching. But the rulers, intrenched within the hoary fortress of rabbinical tradition and dogma, had scorned the words of the lowly innovators. In their ears they sounded like the revolutionary utterances of ignorant fanatics. What thing of worth could be spoken by them? What authority was on their side? Why should they, the accredited teachers of the people, trouble themselves about what was said or done by such men? Were they to listen respectfully to the wild man from the desert, or the meek Man of Nazareth with His following of fishermen? Their attitude was the same as that which they took up in regard to the testimony of the man who was born blind. The strength of his witness lay in the fact that he could say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." In the most emphatic form he testified of that which he had *seen*, but they scorned his

witness. They said, "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" (John 9³⁴). That was the spirit in which they had treated the teaching of Jesus and John. These unlettered men from the uncultivated desert and despised Galilee were presuming to teach them, before whom the people bowed in reverence and fear. In the proud security of high position, they looked upon them with what seemed to be deserved contempt. They did not believe them. They received not their witness.

Nicodemus had at least acquiesced in this conclusion. He may have had doubts as to its wisdom, but he had stood by his order, and is now face to face with the consequences of his action. He is classed among those who had shut their ears to the truth of God uttered by the preachers. He is accused of unbelief. He is taught that his neglect of what had been said in the highways and byways of the land was the cause of his failure to understand what Jesus had said to him in private. There was an inconsistency in his position which he had not recognised. He had said to Jesus, "Thou art a Teacher come from God." He had been led to that conviction by the signs which He did. But in spite of that he had not received His

witness. Jesus had laid no stress on the greeting; indeed, He had ignored it. It was the outcome of a feeling which had not yet hardened into a conviction. It had sufficient influence to lead him into the presence of Jesus, but it was not yet a truth which had been mastered, or which had had its proper consequence in his life. But we must not think that Nicodemus is peculiar in being unconscious of his inconsistency. It is a common failing, a human failing. Men are still ready to admit all that was admitted by Nicodemus, and yet refuse to accept the testimony of Jesus on matters which touch them closely, or about which they think differently. There are even professed believers in Jesus Christ, who call Him "Lord, Lord," and do not the things which He says. Living in an atmosphere of mental or spiritual fog, they sometimes claim liberty of opinion on matters of life and duty as to which He has laid down plain commandments. Like Nicodemus, they do not see that their attitude is really one of unbelief.

What lay at the root of the unbelief of Nicodemus and the rulers was the absence of all authority, which they could recognise, on the side of the new preachers, and the firmly settled conviction that the authority of a

divinely given law was on their side. The conflict which was going on at that time was but an incident in the age-long strife between the authority of well-established tradition, secure in place, privilege, and power, and the claims of experience, based on new truth which had been discovered and new fact which had been proved. Nicodemus and his associates stood on the apparently impregnable position of long-acknowledged official right. They were the guardians of the rich heritage of truth which God had given to the fathers. The sanctions of the law, of which they were the exponents, had never been questioned until now. Generation after generation of Rabbis with infinite toil had built a "hedge" around it, within which the power of tradition had slowly accumulated, until it claimed and exercised unchallenged authority. As well accuse the ancient stars of wrong as hint that it could err. When once the dictum "It is written" was uttered, every matter was definitely settled. There was no further appeal. The history of the world can scarcely show another instance of authority which was at once so particular and so complete. We have to go back to the days of European history, when *Roma locuta est* was a final sentence, before we can find anything like it.

On the side of Jesus and those whom He associated with Himself there was no authority but that which came from the consciousness of what had been seen and known—the power that goes with the personal assurance of a living experience, and the conviction of truth which has been proved. Jesus claims no more than this here. He ever spoke with authority, but it was of another kind than that of “the scribes”; the servants of His opponents being witnesses, “Never man spake like this Man.” His personal claim of authority is larger than that which He makes for Himself and others in speaking to Nicodemus. The realm of nature, the powers of wickedness, the forces which work in physical disease, obeyed His word. He claimed the right to abrogate the Law, to forgive sins, to be the final Judge of Men. His authority proved itself simply because it acted. No accident of place or symbol of power added to its force. It was the effluence of His personality, the prevailing emphasis of truth spoken as by a voice from heaven, the irresistible might of a spirit inspired by a love which sought to redeem the world. It is unique and personal. None other can wield it. But here He claims no other authority than that which was common to

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those who were working with Him at that time, in preaching the things of the Kingdom of God; no other than that which His preachers in all times should claim, and without which they cannot serve Him as He desires to be served. They too must speak with the authority that comes from a personal experience and knowledge of the things which they proclaim.

The religion of Jesus Christ is peculiar, in that it provides a means of verification or proof of much of the faith which it requires. The gospel is not presented as something which has to be accepted only on the word of the preacher or on the authority of a written history. Its truths are the answer to the needs of man, the fulfilment of the aspirations after God and good which "haunt the race." They can be proved by experiment. "The testimony of Christ" is confirmed by the experience of the believer. He too can add to the authority of the word preached the declaration that he has tried the gospel and found it to be the secret of life and peace. There is no room in His Kingdom for the authority of compulsion, or even of "the irresistible syllogism." It is "a house not made with hands." Its life is one of liberty, and the entrance into

it is free. Men are never to be driven into its large and rich domain. The step that takes them within must be the free act of the soul, under the impulse of its own will. The preachers are to appeal to the whole nature of man, in the witness they bear of the gospel of Christ, as the satisfaction of its moral and spiritual necessities, and the answer must be a willing response and acceptance of it.

The fact that the appeal is by the presentation of the truth, safeguards individual liberty and leaves the soul's responsibility untouched. They who hear have to decide whether to accept or reject it. But in fairness to them the gospel must be preached effectively. There must be the tone of authority in what is said. And where shall that be found? The claims of an infallible Church, or of an infallible Book, or of an ancient ecclesiastical creed, or of an unbroken line of apostolical succession, will not serve. The authority which is required will only be found in the line of the Saviour's words to Nicodemus. It is spiritual and personal. They who speak for Christ must say, "We speak that which we know, and we testify of that which we have seen." They must have the power which comes from the personal consciousness of the truth or reality

of the things which they preach. It is not enough to say "we believe," "we have heard," "we have read," though there also is room and need for that kind of testimony in the full declaration of the Christian faith. Convincing speech can only come from a heart which "knows." It has an accent which is quickly recognised, and eloquence and argument are weak without it. The "heavenly things" which we have to declare will only gain credence as our words issue from an evident consciousness of the truth of that which may be seen and known.

It is this accent of authority which is most needed in the preaching of to-day. Without it the proclamation of the word of life is as "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." The people listened in that far-off time when Jesus and His fellow-preachers spoke of the things "which they had seen and known," and they will be ready to listen again when that note of power is repeated. Doubtless there will be opposition and unbelief as there were then, for it was the accent of authority which provoked them; but the clamour and cruelty of those that oppose themselves are better than careless or contemptuous indifference. The hindrance to the progress of the Kingdom

of God which is due to definite and earnest unbelief is as nothing to the hindrance which arises out of the unauthoritative proclamation of the truth. The weakness of the assault is more to blame for defeat than the strength of the fortress or of the sorties which issue from it. The Church of Christ has not too much authority, but too little, and especially, too little of the right kind. It must seek more of the spiritual power which is born out of Christian experience, more of the persuasive emphasis which goes with the words "We know."

It is only then that we can bring in effectively the power of the garnered experience of the generations of believing souls who have proved in life and death the truth of the gospel, and who being dead yet speak. The doctrines and creeds of the Christian Church are the deposit of experience. They are the forms in which the generations of the dead have sought to express the things which they had seen and known. But before we can appeal to their testimony we must have had a similar experience of the reality and truth of the things which we proclaim. And as for the authority of the living Church, what is it but the combined testimony of the present experience of the great company

of believers, speaking of that which they know and testifying of that which they have seen?

We hesitate to take the words of the Lord Jesus and say to those who reject the gospel as preached by us, "Ye receive not our witness." Before we dare to do so we must ask, "Is our witness credible?" "Is it as strong as it might be, or as it should be?" "Is it supported by the consciousness of a personal experience of its primary truths? Then and then only have we any justification in charging an unbelieving world with the sin of unbelief in Jesus. On His lips the charge was just, but it falters on our own.

The conflict between the authority of the past and the authority of the present, which we see in the time of Christ, is inevitable. The struggle between the old truth, which has become formulated dogma out of which the breath of life has fled, and the new truth, which claims the field and has yet to establish itself, is almost continuous. There are times when it becomes intense and critical. Such a time had come when Jesus challenged the reality and truth of Rabbinism, and charged its upholders with ignorance and unbelief. In our own day the contest is going on with considerable keenness. Many of the discoverers of new truths or facts in geology,

biology, or Biblical criticism, have had to stand before the settled power of long tradition, and say, "We speak that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen, and ye receive not our witness." It is well to remember that the Lord Jesus is on the side of those who in any region of thought of life advance the testimony of fact or experience against the dictum of accepted tradition. It will always be presumed that the truth is on the side of the old views and the established ways. The representatives of the forms and interpretations of the past are only to be blamed if, when brought face to face with testimony regarding things seen and known, they do not yield so far as to give them earnest attention and an honest examination. It is these which have been generally refused, as they were refused to Jesus. Old official authorities have rather sought to crush the new ideas, which seemed to them heretical or revolutionary. The truth has prevailed by its own inherent strength, and after many martyrdoms and sufferings. Alas, that when the victory has been secured, it often slowly gathers to itself the hardness of the form which it has displaced, and looks askance at the new discoveries which come in due time with their challenge to the minds of men!

XI

THE PENALTIES OF UNBELIEF

“The heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world.”

“My nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand.”
SHAKESPEARE.

“‘Oh, where is the sea?’ the fishes cried,
As they swam the crystal clearness through.
‘We’ve heard from of old of the ocean’s tide,
And we long to look on the waters blue.
The wise ones speak of an infinite sea;
Oh who can tell us if such there be?’”

“Can he be said to see truly, who, in examining the sun-
spots, misses the sun?”
ROTHER.

CHAPTER XI

THE PENALTIES OF UNBELIEF

THE charge of unbelief had been pressed home on the mind and heart of Nicodemus. He and his associates, who regarded themselves as defenders of the faith, were shown to be its opponents. But there was more to be said. Unbelief is not a merely negative position, it has exclusions, losses, penalties; and these are now to be pointed out. The questions which Nicodemus had asked about the means and methods of the birth from above could be answered, but not to him and his friends so long as they maintained their attitude of unbelief. So Jesus said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" The "earthly things" (literally, "things upon earth") are evidently the contents of the testimony of Jesus and others which had not been accepted. More particularly, they were the things of the Kingdom of God which had

been mentioned in the course of the conversation. They were recognisable, or no accusation would have been made when they were not received. Difficult as they might be, they were easy as compared with other things which Jesus had to say. The "heavenly things" (literally, "things upon heaven") are those which are referred to in the latter part of the narrative—the lifting up of the Son of Man, its connection with regeneration or eternal life, and the love of God to the world.

The distinction is remarkable and suggestive. The things of the Spirit in relation to the birth from above are regarded as *epigeia*, things which have their sphere on earth. But we are not to think of them as if they had no relation to heaven, or as if they were earthly in their origin and character. They too are of heavenly origin and belong to the realm of grace. They are part of the revelation of the mercy of God, which had been gradually growing through prophetic inspiration and teaching, and which had been extended in the preaching of Jesus and John. But in comparison with the revelation which Jesus had yet to make, all the things that had been revealed before were on an earthly plane—they could be seen and known. The heavenly things are those which relate to the

fuller revelation of the grace of God for the furtherance of the Kingdom, the quickening of the life born from above, and its maintenance and development as an eternal life. They are not things unutterable, nor are they alien to the mind of man. They are the mysteries of the Kingdom which men could not discover, but which they could receive when revealed. The necessity of the lifting up of the Son of Man, the relation of that mysterious act to salvation and eternal life, the love of God as the source of the stream of mercy for the world of man—these (in comparison with all that had been revealed before) were “heavenly things,” belonging to the plane of heaven, to the heart and mind of God. They were things which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,” and which “had not entered into the heart of man.” If these things were ever to be known, they must be revealed. On account of their “heavenly” character they cannot be examined as “earthly” things may be. They can only be accepted on testimony. If there is unbelief in regard to things which may be called “earthly,” how can there be faith in regard to things which are “heavenly”? If the words of Jesus are not received when He speaks of things which belong to the sphere of the visible, how can He be believed when

He speaks of things which belong to the invisible? This is the penalty of unbelief.

There is law in the spiritual world, an order in the growth of knowledge of spiritual things. The simpler truths of the Kingdom must be accepted before there is any possibility of knowing or apprehending the higher and more essential matters. The questions which Nicodemus had asked as to the "How?" of the spiritual birth, belonged to the advanced stage of Christian knowledge. They can only be answered to those who have mastered the primary lessons. This law of knowledge is not peculiar to the truths of the Kingdom of God. It rules in every department of thought and life. An inquirer in music may wish to know how a sonata of Beethoven or a nocturne of Chopin is to be played, but he must know the elementary principles of music before any answer is intelligible. Another may ask for an explanation of the Differential Calculus, but no light can be given if at least the simpler elements of mathematics are not understood. Before a guide can show the view from the higher peaks of the mountain, he must be trusted and followed as he leads the way through the mists of the valleys. We must pass through the vestibule of the temple before we can reach the sanctuary.

The distinction between the "earthly" and the "heavenly" things is not exoteric and esoteric. In the Kingdom of God there are no secret mystical truths, which are reserved for the illumination of a favoured few. The "heavenly" things are open to all who can receive them. The penalty of exclusion is not based on any arbitrary or accidental dictum of privilege or authority. Its principle is radical and universal, because it is spiritual. As the glory of the world is shut out from the blind, because of the lack of sight, so the glory of the heavenly truths which Jesus came to reveal is hidden from the unbelieving because of the lack of faith. They are "hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes," because in these there is the faculty of trust in its purest and strongest form. Faith is the condition or organ of spiritual intelligence. *Credo ut intelligam* is the rule of all advance in the knowledge of the things of Christ. Where there is no faith there is no vision. The penalty is inevitable. The glory of the "heavenly" things, the lifting up of the Son of Man, the loving tenderness and grace of God for sinful men, which is the distinctive revelation of Christianity, are all concealed where faith is absent. It is here that the wise words of Ruskin are most true: "I

marvel not at what men suffer, but at what they lose." And it is not only in regard to the things of Christ that unbelief exacts a penalty. The whole outlook on life is darkened. "I am not ashamed to confess," said G. J. Romanes,¹ "that with this virtual negation of God the universe to me had lost its soul of loveliness. . . . When at times I think, as think I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as I now find it, at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is susceptible." That is a confession of a penalty that had been experienced and recognised, but the penalty is the same even though it is not known or felt. There is only added to it the deeper and darker poverty of the soul which men endure when they are unconscious of their loss. Of all the penalties that unbelief lays upon the life of man, this is the most vast and dreadful, that men should be blind to the glory of the gospel of Christ and not know that they are blind.

It is possible that the conversation may have ended with these words: "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how

¹ *Life and Letters*, pp. 83, 84, note.

shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" Nicodemus could not receive the heavenly things. His spiritual receptivity had been exhausted. His surprise at the teaching of what our Lord calls "earthly things" was the proof that the limit had been overpassed. He would most likely have repeated his "How? How can these things be?" if our Lord had endeavoured to enlighten him further. Nothing more could be said to him on that line that would have made matters any clearer. Jesus might have said to him, as He said to His disciples at a later date, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." He had always to create His audience, and to fit what He said to their powers of apprehension. Nicodemus might have been thrown into an attitude of utter opposition if he was further perplexed or bewildered. There was therefore kindness as well as severity in saying no more to him then. Jesus was never afraid to stop when He saw that there was no use in continuing. He did not hesitate to refuse information when He saw that it would do no good, even though the refusal might expose Him to misrepresentation. When the chief priests and the rulers of the temple came to Him with their favourite question about His authority

(Matt. 21²³⁻²⁷), He asked them what they thought of the ministry of John the Baptist. "Was it from heaven or from men?" The question was not asked as a subterfuge, or to put the rulers in a difficulty, or to turn away their thoughts from what they had asked. The question was put to test their spiritual receptivity. Had they been able to recognise in John any of the characteristics of spiritual power? When they said, "We cannot tell," He replied, "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." They could not have understood Him if He had told them. As they had not recognised the signs of authority in John, who had all the characteristics of an ancient prophet, they would not recognise His, which were of a somewhat different order. As He said no more to them, so He may have said no more to Nicodemus. A few words may have been spoken which indicated in an elementary and typical form what the heavenly things were. Possibly some reference was made to "the serpent in the wilderness," as an illustration of the things whose meaning was hidden from Nicodemus. A word of that kind was fitted to arrest the thought of Nicodemus, and to remain in his mind as a constant stimulus to the endeavour to discover what it meant.

Our Lord may also have said something more about the penalties of unbelief, and the danger of hiding from the light. Or it may have been that reference to these and other things in the narrative was made to the disciples after Nicodemus had gone away. But it may be taken as a fact that any further truths which were communicated then, were not spoken in the form in which they appear in the record. At that early stage in the life of discipleship the personal followers of Jesus were not able to receive them in the completed form in which the evangelist sets them down. Even at the close of the Saviour's ministry they were offended when He began to speak of His death. The pure universalism of the love of God, which shines so clearly in verse 16, was beyond the vision of men who were absorbed in imaginations of the glory of the earthly kingdom which they thought their Master was to set up and in which they were to have a place. The "heavenly things" are expressed in what we may call their final form, and it was not possible for the evangelist to receive them, even if they had been spoken in that way then. The truths are not his. They are seed-thoughts from the mind of Christ. They bear the impress of that royal mint. They are the "heavenly things" which

Jesus alone could tell. In the form in which they appear in the Gospel they are the perfected outcome of the reflections of the evangelist on the significance, in relation to the Kingdom of God, of the teaching, life, and death of his Master, as seen in the light of the Resurrection, and as apprehended under the influence of the Holy Spirit in the course of a long life of meditation and obedience.

What is seen in this part of the Gospel is characteristic of the whole of it. The Synoptic Gospels are the record of carefully preserved tradition. They give us the words of the Lord Jesus, as nearly as may be in the form in which they were spoken. But the venerable disciple John, though he was familiar with the tradition, did not set himself to repeat what had been said already. In giving his own impression of the life and teaching of the Saviour, he gave it as it had shaped itself in his own mind in the course of a long life. It was inevitable that it should be so. Tradition can preserve itself by mechanical aids. It had done its best when it repeated what it had received. If there was to be any other representation of the words and works of Jesus, it must be of the kind that John has given. The words of the Lord Jesus had been gradually wrought out

into this rich treasury of truth, this faithful representation of His mind, as the evangelist saw the meaning and relation of the ideas or principles which they expressed. There are not a few indications in the Gospel itself that there was in the experience of the disciples a growing apprehension of the significance of the things which Jesus did and said. It is said, "These things understood not the disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him" (John 12¹⁶). Jesus also had promised that the Spirit would lead them into all the truth (John 16¹³). A representation of that guidance was therefore to be expected, and it is that which we have in the Fourth Gospel.

One fact there is which gives confidence in the truthfulness of this developed declaration of the mind of Christ. It was not peculiar to the mind of John. In the letters of Paul and in the Epistle to the Hebrews we see a remarkable correspondence in the presentation of the truth as it is in Jesus. The teaching of the First Epistle of John is in entire agreement with the teaching of the Gospel according to John. There are also correspondences, though in a less noticeable degree, in the First

Epistle of Peter. It is not enough to say that Paul or John was the originator of these ways of presenting the mind of Christ, and that the others were mastered by the force and majesty of his influence. Rather, there was a yet greater Mind that brought them all under its spell—the mind of their Master, Christ. The development of truth was going on contemporaneously throughout the whole Church. Face to face as the first Apostles were with the problem of the world's need, commissioned also to preach the gospel of Christ as the one hope of its salvation, they were under the necessity of understanding the significance of what they had to proclaim, and to find in it the principles which justified the work they had to do in all its vastness and universality. What the evangelist gives us is therefore something better than the record of tradition, precious as that must always be. He gives us the mind of Christ as interpreted and developed by the Holy Spirit, through years of thought and experience in the proclamation of His gospel to the world. We cannot draw the line anywhere, and say that here are the words of Jesus and here are the comments of the evangelist. We are content to take the whole as an expression of the mind of our Lord, to regard the form in which

it is presented as the work of the evangelist, and to say in the words of Beyschlag, "This Gospel, with all its freedom and subjectivity, still remains the most faithful image and memorial of Jesus which any man could produce."¹ There is no better explanation of its peculiar characteristics than that which Browning has put into the mouth of St. John in *A Death in the Desert*—

"Since much that at the first in deed and word
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,
Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,
Guarded and guided still to see and speak)
Of new significance and fresh result :
What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,
And named them in the Gospel I have writ."

¹ *New Testament Theology*, vol. i. p. 223.

XII

THE ONLY REVEALER OF HEAVENLY THINGS

“ Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”

PETER THE APOSTLE.

“ Before Christ we had heard of God : in Christ we have seen Him.”

ROTHER.

CHAPTER XII

THE ONLY REVEALER OF HEAVENLY THINGS

It is generally recognised that the narrative of the interview between Jesus and Nicodemus falls into two parts. The first part (1-12) is a record in the form of a conversation. Its subject-matter is characterised as "earthly things." In the second part (13-21) we have not so much a continuation of the conversation, as a presentation on the part of the evangelist of the "heavenly things" or certain essential truths relating to the matter under discussion. These truths may have been referred to in a germ form during the interview, but they are set forth as they had taken shape in the mind of the evangelist from a completed view of the Master's teaching, and as they had been developed through experience and reflection under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is, however, also to be noticed, that in the

second part the subject-matter is really the same as in the first part, but it is dealt with on an altogether higher plane—the heavenly. The distinction between “earthly” and “heavenly” in the two divisions of the narrative is so marked, that it may explain why the evangelist has employed the phrase “Kingdom of God” in verses 3 and 5. In some of its aspects it is an “earthly thing,” but to have called it the “Kingdom of Heaven” would have obscured the distinction between the two divisions. The unity of subject is so evident that we may say the “heavenly things” overlie the “earthly things.” The correspondence is remarkable. The admission that Jesus is “a teacher come from God” is superseded by the assertion that He “came down from heaven” in a way that was entirely unique. The life that issues in the birth from above reappears as “eternal life.” The question as to how a man can be born into the life of the Kingdom is answered in the declaration of the necessity of faith in the Son of Man lifted up. The mystery of the movements of the Spirit has as its counterpart the greater mystery of the love of God for the whole world of sinful men. The penalty of unbelief is shown in clearer outline and in darker colours, as a condemnation of those

who love darkness rather than light, and especially as a self-condemnation of those who do not believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God, who is the "Light" that has come into the world.

The absolute necessity of faith in Jesus before any knowledge of the "heavenly things" is possible, arises from the peculiar way in which they have been revealed. They are beyond the scope of the discovery of man. "No man has ascended up to heaven," that he might gain a knowledge of them and bring back the wonderful tidings. Nor can anyone ascend to examine for himself into the truth of any report that might be brought. The revelation can only be made by one who has descended from heaven. The verse in which the claim of Jesus to be the only revealer of the heavenly things is expressed is elliptical. It is not to be read as if it implied that Jesus during His earthly life had ascended to heaven to bring to man the knowledge of the mercy and love of God, as Moses ascended Mount Sinai to bring back the revelation of His will in the Ten Commandments. The ascending in the first part of the verse is not predicated of Jesus. It is negatively predicated of any man. What is affirmed of Jesus is that

He descended, not that He ascended. The testimony of the evangelist concerning the claim of Jesus corresponds in a striking degree with that of Paul where he says, "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4^{9,10}). The ascension to which Paul refers is that which followed the Resurrection. That is the only ascension of Jesus that the New Testament knows. It is that ascension, regarded by the evangelist as already past, which lies behind the words "who is in heaven" at the close of the verse. He means that the Son of Man has gone back to the place from whence He had come, and that He is there. The difficulty of interpreting this phrase as spoken to Nicodemus by Jesus has led to its omission from several MSS.,¹ but the difficulty disappears if it is read as coming from the evangelist, to whom at the time of writing the ascension was an accomplished fact. Others who accept the phrase as spoken by Jesus endeavour to solve the difficulty by interpreting the word "heaven" locally at the beginning of the

¹ Note I.

verse, and spiritually at the close of it. But such an interpretation gives away more than it seems to gain. If "heaven" can be taken spiritually in one part of the verse, it may also be taken spiritually in another part, and thus the uniqueness of the claim, and assertion of any real descent of Jesus from heaven, falls to the ground. On the other hand, if "heaven" is interpreted locally in both instances (and our ignorance and the poverty of language compel us so to speak), the solution is simple. The claim of a unique descent of the Son of Man is maintained in all its definiteness, and the words "who is in heaven" find a satisfactory explanation as an assertion by the evangelist that Jesus had ascended to where He was before. The simplicity of this explanation of the difficulty attending these words confirms us in the opinion that the form of the narrative is due to the evangelist writing from the standpoint of developed faith and reflection.

The evangelist is repeating a claim which he had often heard from the lips of Jesus. It is not a deduction that he has made from the peculiar character of the revelation that had been accomplished by Jesus. He is expressing a claim which Jesus had frequently made, and made, it may be, at this time. The fact

of the claim is unquestioned. It reappears again and again in this Gospel. It is found in the words, "I am the bread which came down from heaven" (John 6⁴¹), "I am come down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6³⁸), "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up to where He was before?" (John 6⁶²). The assertion of the evangelist that He "came down from heaven" is based on the revealed consciousness of Jesus.

How then is the claim and assertion to be understood? It is not to be taken as another way of expressing the fact that Jesus regarded Himself as one who was "sent of God" as that phrase is applied to John the Baptist and the older prophets. Jesus would never have been accused of blasphemy (Matt. 26⁶³⁻⁶⁵) if that was all He meant or was understood to claim. Neither is it to be interpreted as an affirmation that Jesus came into the actual world from the ideal world, in which all things pre-exist in the mind of God. To understand the claim in that way is to regard it as a transcendental figure of speech out of which all real or solid meaning has vanished. Jesus would be taken as expressing in this unique and peculiar way the fact that He claimed to have come down from heaven into the world,

as everyone else and everything else had come. It was not by such ethereal and philosophical forms of speech that Jesus changed the thoughts and hope of the world.

The claim and assertion that Jesus "came down from heaven" (whatever local sense we give to the word) must be interpreted in the line of the prologue which stands as an introduction to the whole of the Gospel. It was the "Word that was with God," and "was God," that "came from heaven" and "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1¹⁴). This is how His disciples understood it. No explanation of the source of their assertion regarding it is satisfactory which does not recognise that it was entirely due to the revelation of the consciousness of Jesus. To monotheistic Jews the idea of an Incarnation of God was more alien than that of a suffering Messiah. Their whole conception of the nature of God had to be enlarged and changed before it was possible for them to receive such a thought. That enlargement and change came to them as they remained in the company of Jesus, and listened to His words, and were influenced by His character and personality. Brought up as they had been in the strictest monotheism, taught to say each day, "The Lord our God is one

Lord," it was impossible for them of themselves to attribute a heavenly descent to Jesus, and declare, as they did declare, that He was "in the beginning with God," and "was God," and "became flesh and dwelt among us." It was Jesus who gave them this new and marvellous faith, as it was He who gave them the gospel of the redeeming love and mercy of God for all mankind. The Saviour and the Salvation wrought by Him are one in character and origin. They "came down from heaven." The divine personality of Jesus is the basis of the new conceptions of God and the world and the redemption of man of which the New Testament is full. The Fourth Evangelist repeats the claim of Jesus with greater distinctness than the Synoptists, but it is included in the definite assertions of an essential Sonship which are recorded by them. The faith of the Gospels is also the faith of the Epistles. It is not John alone who thus presents the claim of his Lord and ours. It is the faith of the New Testament which we repeat when we sing—

"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ !
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father ;
When Thou tookst upon Thee to deliver man
Thou didst not abhor the virgin's womb."

It is this descent from heaven which enables

Him to speak of heavenly things, and which makes Him their only revealer. The revelation is not made through Him, it is made in Him. In Him they have come down from heaven. The redeeming grace of God is His grace. The infinite love of God is His love. The thoughts of God, which are high above ours as the heavens are high above the earth, are His thoughts. It was not a message that He had to deliver, or a theory that He had to expound; it was an unveiling of the fulness of God in the limits of the flesh of man. The certainty and authority of His revelation do not depend on the accuracy of the memory of what He had seen or heard in a state of pre-existence. They are not the product of any "shadowy recollections." They spring from the consciousness of an essential and abiding unity with God which was in Him. That was the secret fountain of His truth and the source of His power in expressing it. "Never man spake like this Man," for never man was like this Man. "Nothing in the age in which He appeared or in the foregoing ages accounts for Him, and the after times have been moulded by Him."¹ The truths which have brought love and hope and peace to mankind

¹ Conder, *Basis of Faith*, p. 297.

are found in Him alone, because of Him alone it is said, "He came down from heaven." They are first and finally, perfectly and only, revealed in Him; He is their Alpha and their Omega. That is why there must be faith in Him if they are to be received in their fulness. We cannot believe in His revelation unless we believe in Him. It is through Him, and not through any truth revealed by Him, that we gain the new relations with God out of which the new life comes. "The Word became flesh" that "to as many as received Him" He might give the "right to become sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name" (John 1¹²). He and no other is "the Fountain Light of all our day . . . the Master Light of all our seeing."

His new name for Himself, which the evangelist repeats, is "the Son of Man." From the view we have taken of the general character of the Fourth Gospel, we cannot agree with the common opinion that this name was never used except by Jesus Himself. We believe that it was a designation which Jesus chose for Himself, but that the evangelist repeats it in giving expression to the claim which he had often heard from the lips of the Master, it may be in association with it. He employs it not as his name for Jesus, or as one which

was in use among His disciples. He gives it as a name which Jesus Himself had adopted.

Its interpretation, however, is one of the standing difficulties of the New Testament. In a measure we may say that it resembles the new name on the white stone, "which no man knoweth saving him that receiveth it" (Rev. 2¹⁷). Our Lord gave no explanation of its meaning, and none of the disciples appears to have asked for one. Throughout the Gospels we search in vain for any interpretation of it on the part of the evangelists. It seems to be assumed that none was needed. Once only is the question asked as to what it meant, when the people in perplexity said, "Who is this Son of Man?" (John 12³⁴). But no definite answer was given to them. They only received the urgent injunction to "walk in the light while the light was with them." In modern times its interpretation has become a crucial matter. Different degrees of significance are attached to the name, and these are found to relate themselves to diverse views of the Lord's person. In general, it is agreed that the name was taken by our Lord from the vision of kingdoms in the Book of Daniel (7¹⁻¹⁴).¹ A contrast is there drawn

¹ Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, pp. 234, 235. A most illuminating chapter.

between the kingdoms of brute force, symbolised by the lion, the bear, the leopard, and the monstrous "beast, dreadful and terrible, with great iron teeth and ten horns," whose dominion falls and passes, and the kingdom which is given "to One like the Son of Man," whose dominion is everlasting, and shall not pass away. "The brute kingdoms are succeeded by a human kingdom, the dominion of selfishness and violence by the dominion of reason and goodness."¹ The name was evidently chosen by our Lord because of its fitness in relation to the character of the Kingdom which He was to establish and of which He was the Head. It was sometimes, but not universally, identified with the Messiah in the Jewish exegesis of Daniel 7¹³. But the phrase is also used in the Old Testament as a synonym for man (as in Ps. 8⁴, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him?"), and expresses the littleness and lowliness of man in the sight of God. The title as employed by Jesus was Messianic: it accorded with His consciousness of a descent from heaven, it expressed the fact that His Kingdom was not of this world, and yet it had sufficient elasticity to embrace the concep-

¹ Denney, *Studies in Theology*, p. 36.

tion of suffering and death. The title both revealed and concealed the claim. To those among the Jews who held the common ideas of the outward glory of the Messiah, it would never suggest that Jesus was claiming that dignity ; for there was no sign of such glory as they expected in His condition. It may only have conveyed to them a suggestion of humility and weakness, but it was full of Messianic significance to those whose minds were enlightened. In this respect it resembles many of our Lord's sayings, which were obscure to the unbelieving but clear to those who had faith in Him. The very elements of weakness and lowliness which were associated with the phrase found their place in the title as used by Jesus. Not by might or power, not by violence or selfishness, but by service and sacrifice was His Kingdom to be established, for "the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The modern interpretations which regard it as indicating that Jesus was the "Ideal Man," "the Head of the human race," the "Archetype of Humanity," are outside the range of the ruling ideas of the Gospel. We may accept them as true while we do not receive them as included in our Lord's use

of the title. That the title expressed some real relation to humanity is evident ; "Son of *Man*" would be meaningless if it did not do so. It is more in keeping with the ideas of the New Testament when we regard it as an assertion on the part of Jesus not only of His heavenly origin, but also of His true humanity. It agrees with the testimony that "He had come in the flesh," which is found everywhere on its pages. Thus within the compass of a single verse the two great truths of our Lord's divinity and humanity are brought together. He who "came down from heaven" was "the Son of Man." The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, that all flesh might understand the love and grace and truth of God. The heavenly things have become available for mankind universally, because they have been revealed in the Son of Man.

" For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face ;
And Love the human form divine,
And Peace the human dress.

Then every man of every clime
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine :
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace."¹

¹ Wm. Blake, *The Divine Image*.

XIII
THE LIFTING UP OF THE
SON OF MAN

“Not in cheap words He owned mankind His kin.”

“Expect not any termination of this thy anguish, till some one of the Gods appear as thy successor, and be willing to go down into the unlighted Hades and around the gloomy depths of Tartarus.”—ÆSCHYLUS, *Pro. Vin.*

“Is it not strange, the darkest hour
That ever dawn'd on sinful earth
Should touch the heart with softer power
For comfort than an angel's mirth?
That to the Cross the mourner's eye should turn
Sooner than where the stars of Christmas burn?”
KEBLE, *Good Friday.*

CHAPTER XIII

THE LIFTING UP OF THE SON OF MAN

THE heavenly things have been made accessible to faith by the descent from heaven of the Son of Man. They are the secret things of God, which are beyond our ken till they are revealed. The revelation was made by the Son of Man that there might be no limit or barrier to its extension. Every nation and generation of mankind may now know them, for the Son of Man stands in a universal relation to the race in whose "flesh" He came. All men may know what He has revealed.

The revelation is made in a threefold manner. After the way of the ancient prophets, but with a variety, range, and power far surpassing theirs, the heavenly things were proclaimed in the words and works of the Son of Man. But that mode of revelation is imperfect, and left much untold. The need of man is greater than any knowledge im-

parted in speech can supply. It is not only knowledge but life that is needed. Knowledge can dispel ignorance, but life can only come from life, and the life from above from Him who came down from heaven.

“And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought.”

The Incarnate life was more than the wondrous words of truth and the gracious deeds of mercy, but even that did not complete the revelation of the heavenly things which God had prepared for the redemption of man. Words and deeds and life did not tell all that was to be told. Something more was needed before the Kingdom of Heaven could be fully opened to all believers. There must be “the lifting up of the Son of Man.” The necessity of the death of Christ for the accomplishment of the work which He had come to do is stated by all the evangelists, but this way of describing it is peculiar to the Gospel according to John. It finds its sufficient explanation in the words which are added in a later part of the Gospel, where the same expression occurs—“This He said, signifying by what death He should die”

(John 12³³). It is to the death upon the cross that reference is made when it is said, that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." We have no doubt but that the comparison was made by Jesus, though something of the form of the verse may be due to the evangelist. It was only He who could so open the Scriptures or use such an image. It is one entirely by itself. It seems right and appropriate that He should be likened to the innocent "lamb," the life-sustaining "bread," the refreshing and cleansing "water," the "shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep," but we are conscious of meeting with something unexpected when we find Him likened to a serpent. The boldness of the comparison stamps it as His own. We also think that it was made in the hearing of Nicodemus. It was a comparison which was fitted to arrest his thought and stimulate his mind to the effort to discover what was meant by it.

The difficulty of admitting that our Lord should make such a veiled reference to His death at so early a period of His ministry has been much exaggerated. It is recognised that His teaching relative to His death became definite and frequent after the great

confession at Cæsarea Philippi, but this definite teaching to the disciples presupposes a much earlier recognition of its inevitableness in His own mind. The direct references to that event date "from that time," because the disciples had then reached a stage of faith which permitted Him to speak of it "openly." That very word "openly" (Mark 8³²), or, as it may be translated more literally, "with fullest freedom," implies that there had been hidden or veiled references to it before. The foreshadowing of the days of sorrow when the bridegroom would be taken away, is one of these, and the reference to the lifting up is another. Even at the time of the interview with Nicodemus there were facts of experience whose meaning He could read. Already He had said, "Ye receive not our witness." Even if He gained the knowledge of the inevitableness of His death by His experience of the unbelief of men, He had no need to wait until that unbelief had realised and revealed all its passion and virulence. The germ of it was enough to show Him what it would lead to. He could understand the meaning of the cloud on the horizon though it was no larger than a man's hand.

The peculiar emphasis which is laid upon His death in the New Testament is not due

to any of His followers. It was a "stumbling-block" to them. When Peter first realised that Jesus wished him to know that He must die, he cried out in dismay, "Be it far from Thee, Lord!" (Matt. 16²²). It was Jesus and no other who gave it its unique significance. It was, we believe, no afterthought of His, born from the experience of the unbelief of man, rather it was part of His consciousness from the beginning that His mission could only be accomplished, and the heavenly things fully revealed, by His death. Such a veiled reference to it as we find here is what we should expect, since He is speaking of the revelation of these things.

The mind may linger over the wonderful comparison between the lifting up of the Son of Man and the lifting up of the brazen serpent. We may find more in it than was at first intended, but not more than the teaching of the New Testament warrants.¹ The serpent had a close relation to the sin of the Israelites, and the lifting up of the Son of Man, a yet closer relation to the sin of the world. There was no venom in the serpent of brass, but it was made in the likeness of that which had the power of death in it; and so He who knew no sin was made in the

¹ Note J.

likeness of sinful flesh, and became sin for us. The serpent was shown as vanquished and powerless, and on the cross the sin of man was crucified. The brazen serpent represented all the fiery serpents, and the Son of Man represented all mankind. It was the means that God had provided for the recovery of physical life to the dying Israelites, but He was the means God had provided that sinful men might gain eternal life. A look with the eye was enough for the Israelite, but the look of faith was required in the perishing sinner. The Israelite could not understand what was the relation between looking at the serpent and the recovery of health, and the sinner may not understand why faith in the Son of Man lifted up should have such healing virtue. These are some of the thoughts which arise in the mind as it dwells on the comparison between the type and the antitype, but there are only three elements in it to which reference is made in the text, and to these we must confine ourselves—the lifting up, the eternal life, and the look of faith.

It is the lifting up which is the chief point in the comparison. The word is mentioned twice—"As Moses lifted up the serpent, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." To

Jesus, and to John as taught by Him, the "lifting up" was doubly significant. It meant death upon the cross, but it also suggested the beginning of His exaltation. As the serpent was lifted up that it might be seen, we are compelled to adopt the same reason for the lifting up of the Son of Man. It is a marvellous thought, an amazing foresight. The death which was intended to consign Him and His teaching to oblivion was the means by which attention was directed to them. That which was to make Him "accursed" became the means by which He entered into His glory. His name was not obscured but was exalted above all other names by the shame which men put upon it. The crucifixion was the first step of exaltation, the beginning of a higher stage of revelation. The heavenly things could not be perfectly revealed in life or word or deed; only by death could they be manifested in all their wonder, power, and grace. The death was a fact revealing other facts; the accomplishment and unveiling of that which could not be accomplished or made known in any other way. Revelation concentrates there. The light from heaven is focussed there. The cross is the highest and fullest unveiling of the heavenly things because it is the highest

and fullest revelation of the Son of Man. The revealing power of the cross was not an afterthought suggested by experience of its effect, it was anticipated and foretold by Jesus Himself. He said, "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He" (John 8²⁸). The veil that hid His glory fell from Him then. What He was and what He did were then revealed to the world.

What was revealed or accomplished in the lifting up of the Son of Man is not defined, but it was sufficient for the need of man. Eternal life comes by it to all who believe. It is quite beside the mark to say, that as there was no element of propitiation or atonement in the lifting up of the brazen serpent, so there is none of these things in the lifting up of the Son of Man. The comparison indicates that the type and the antitype were alike in the common fact that both were lifted up that they might be made visible. But we must distinguish between the method of revelation and its contents. It is absurd to think that there is nothing more in the antitype than there was in the type, nothing more in Christ crucified than in the brazen serpent. The lifting up of the Son of Man *must* mean more. The means whereby men receive

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eternal life must have a vastly deeper significance than that which only brought physical health to the tribes of Israel. We have not to deal in this passage with the heavenly things which were revealed on the cross, but only with the fact that there the revelation was made. Elsewhere in the New Testament, and especially in the Johannine writings, these are set forth, as far as words can express them ; but, having shown that this text does not exclude them, we may say the particular truth which is taught here is the fact that as the serpent in the wilderness showed the mercy of God to Israelites dying under the punishment of their disobedience, so the Son of Man *shows* the mercy of God to sinful men perishing in the sin which had separated them from the life that was life indeed. That it had a relation to sin is certain. The comparison indicates that, though it does not show what the relation was. Any explanation of the means by which the sin of man is taken away, and the life eternal is brought within the reach of the perishing, must be inadequate. The working of the forces of redemption and regeneration surpasses all the types and symbols of the Bible, as it surpasses all the descriptions and theories of men. These catch but side-lights, flashing forth from the central ineffable

mystery of the divine purpose of grace. God's thoughts remain high above ours as the heavens are above the earth. At every moment "we are in the presence of forces which issue from infinity and pass out of our sight even while we are contemplating them." But the fact remains that here there is the power of God working in a way that was undiscoverable by man, by which new life, eternal life, was brought to the perishing. It is the accomplishment of all that had to be done to unseal the fountain of regeneration to a sinful and dying world.

But while the comparison between the serpent and the Son of Man expresses the idea that He must be lifted up to be made manifest, the context suggests a deeper reason for that necessity. The need of man is imperative—"Ye must be born from above." At times the heart is overwhelmed by the severity and universality of this law. But relief comes and hope springs up when we recognise that there is also a necessity for the lifting up of the Son of Man. Surely that means more than that, like the serpent, He may become visible? As we see how the second part of this narrative takes up the truths which are expressed in the first part, and deals with them as from the plane of heaven, are we

not encouraged, emboldened to say that the necessity of the Son of Man being lifted up has a relation to the necessity of the new birth on the part of men? The necessity of man has as its heavenly counterpart the necessity of God. The "must" of man's need has its correspondence in the "must" of God's mercy. Behind the Incarnation and the lifting up of Jesus Christ there is the will of God, acting under what we may describe, in our poor human way, as the necessity of providing a remedy for the sin of a fallen and perishing world. The Son of Man did not come down from heaven, and was not lifted up on the cross, without an adequate reason. It was under the compulsion of a divine necessity lying on the heart of God to save the lost whom He had made in His image.

"I feel a need divine
That meeteth need of mine ;
No rigid fate I meet, no law austere.
I see my God, who turns
And o'er His creature yearns :
Upon the cross God gives and claims the tear."¹

As we think of it we can only repeat the adoring words of Paul, and say, "O the depths of the riches both of the knowledge and the wisdom of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

¹ Dora Greenwell, *Carmina Crucis*.

As the Son of Man far transcends the serpent of brass, so the blessing which comes through Him is grander far than that which came to the Israelites in the wilderness. They were dying from the envenomed sting of the serpents sent among them because of disobedience, but the world in which Jesus was lifted up was perishing through sin that separated it from the life of God. The gift of the grace of God must meet the need of man. It is the "life from above" that had been lost, and it is "life from above" that has to be gained. But it is described in a new way as "eternal life." It is the blessing of the Kingdom of God viewed as a personal possession. The description is peculiar to this Gospel, but it agrees with the "life" which is spoken of with such emphasis in the other Gospels. According to them, to enter into the Kingdom is to enter into "life" (Matt. 18^{3,8,9}). It is not so much duration that is expressed by the word "eternal," as the peculiar quality of the life that arises out of the new relations with God which are brought about by Jesus Christ. It is a deathless life, although the believer has still to die, "and go unterrified into the gulf of Death." It may be described as a life which seeks to obey an eternal rule, the will of God ; which is inspired

by an eternal motive, the love of God ; which lives for and is lightened by an eternal glory, the glory of God ; and abides in an eternal blessedness, communion with God. It is both present and future. Here and now for the believer there are a new heaven and a new earth, and the glory of God doth lighten them, and the Lamb is the light thereof. No change which time or death can bring has power to affect the essential character of his life, though its glory as terrestrial is one, and its glory as celestial is another. Wherever after death the man may be who has believed in Jesus, the life that he lives will be the same in its inner spirit and relation.

“To him all one, if on the earth or in the sun,”

God's will must be his law, God's glory his light, God's presence his blessedness, God's love his inspiration and joy.

The blessing of physical health came to the Israelite by a look at the serpent of brass lifted up to catch his eye, and the greater blessing of eternal health or life comes to the sinner by the look of faith directed to the Son of Man, lifted up. In the life and death of Christ there are unveiled before the minds of men the great realities regarding God, of which they had never dreamed. Their images

and theologies tell us what their thoughts were. Now it is revealed that He was not such as they had imagined. He was holy and true, loving and good, willing not that any should perish, but have eternal life. His grace is so full that nothing has been left undone or unsaid which could convince men of the reality of His goodwill, or lead them to accept His love as true and yield to it in glad belief. But it is no mere act of credence that is sufficient for entrance into this life. It is the outgoing of the energy of the soul in trustful acceptance of Christ and confident reliance upon Him. It is the response of the whole man to the revelation of the grace of God, by which the heavenly things are received, and the soul enters into new relations of peace and fellowship with God. It is not merely an intellectual recognition of the fact that Jesus was lifted up, for that will leave the sinner as dead in sins as before. The faith must be heart-felt, the recognition of Christ must be spiritual and real, touching not only the mind but the emotions, and moving the will to loyal and eager devotion to Him.

The new life requires a new mind which is in agreement with the mind of God, and a new heart in which there is no desire so strong as that which seeks to please Him. The heavenly things revealed in the lifting up of

the Son of Man may not be understood. They always pass beyond our knowledge ; we may apprehend them though we cannot comprehend them. But it is not they which save, it is Christ. In the mind of every believer there will always be the desire and effort after knowledge, but eternal life does not wait on understanding, it waits on faith, on faith in Him.

The birth from above is an individual necessity because it is a universal necessity. The Kingdom of Heaven is entered not by nations or families, but by persons, singly. The need of life is a personal need, and that is wonderfully balanced by the provision that "whosoever believeth in Him¹ should have eternal life." Faith is a personal act and creates personal relations. It links the believer with the Saviour, and in the union eternal life is found. Therefore the way of life is the same for all and it is open to everyone. The majesty and simplicity and grace of the declarations of the gospel of Jesus Christ are a warrant of its truth. It demands from all a new life, and life is offered to all in the Son of Man, to everyone that believeth in Him. It says nothing about the past, and demands no promise of reformation for the future. It

¹ Note K.

comes to man as he is, sinful and helpless, and sets Jesus Christ before him, in all the tenderness and grace of His living and dying love—a love that is eternal, and is the same “yesterday and to-day and for ever,” and only asks that he should trust Him. Truly “the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared.”

“Tell it in the highest heavens,
Tell it in the depths below,
Tell it to the lost and outcast,
Tell it in the haunts of woe ;
To the very chief of sinners
Let the blessed tidings go ;
He who asks to be forgiven
Shall the Saviour’s mercy know.”

XIV

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CROSS OR OF THE LIFTING UP OF THE SON OF MAN

"Can it be true the grace He is declaring?

Oh! let us trust Him, for His words are fair.

Man, what is this, and why art thou despairing?

God shall forgive thee all but thy despair."

F. W. H. MYERS.

"The Universe is simply God and I."—GOETHE.

"What the hungry heart of our time needs is experience of an original personal relation to divine things."

GEORGE ALBERT COE.

"Love can love more than reason can understand, and love can enter where reason must remain without."

TAULER.

"God came to me as Truth. I saw Him not.

He came to me as Love, and my heart broke,

And from its inmost depths there came a cry,

'My Father, oh my Father, smile on me!'

And the Great Father smiled."

"Hatred can never heal."—ERSKINE OF LINLATHEN.

"What doubt in thee could countervail

Belief in it? Upon the ground

'That in the story had been found

Too much love!' How could God love so?"

R. BROWNING, *Christmas Eve*.

"I report as a man may of God's work:

All's love, yet all's law."

R. BROWNING, *Saul*.

CHAPTER XIV

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE CROSS

IN the majestic verse, "For God so loved the world, that¹ He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3¹⁶), we have the interpretation of the lifting up of the Son of Man. It has been called a "little gospel" because it contains all the gospels. This is the heavenly mystery which none but He who came down from heaven could reveal, which He could only reveal upon the cross. The Son of Man was lifted up that He might become manifest, and it is this love of God which is seen as the look of faith is directed to Him. The brazen serpent was the token of the mercy of God to the dying Israelites, but here is the revelation of Love to the world—infinite love in the heart of God, such love that He gave His only-begotten Son to die that sinful men might not perish, but have

¹ Note L.

eternal life. Some hint of this we believe was given to Nicodemus, sitting in silent amazement before this teacher whose every word would deepen the conviction that He had come from God. But the perfect form of the declaration in the text shows the height of vision to which the evangelist had attained as he meditated on the finished word and work of His ascended Lord, and as the Spirit led him into all the truth. The truth itself is not his, for it is far above him. It is the revelation of the Son of God, received at first in many parts and in divers manners, but now at last unified and understood, which is expressed in this final and perfect form. It is the outcome of reflection on the completed revelation—a gathering into one marvellous sentence of the essential meaning of all the words of life and love which the evangelist had heard, of all the deeds of love which he had seen, and, above all, of the death and exaltation of his Lord, as their significance became clear to him in the experience of “eternal life” and under the illumination and guidance of the promised Guide. The words, “His only-begotten Son,” tell us that we are listening to one who is speaking from the standpoint of faith. We therefore think it was the evangelist who thus expressed the interpretation of the heavenly

things which had been accomplished and manifested in the lifting up of the Son of Man. This is what was intended to be seen. This is what he had seen. The verse is so simple and so profound that every effort to expound its fulness of truth results in a sense of insufficiency and failure. In it are hid the inexhaustible treasures of God.

It is the Love of God that is revealed in the lifting up of the Son of Man. That is a fact which had never been known to men before. We search in vain among the religions of the world for any approach to it. We find gods of war and wine and wisdom, gods of the land and sea, Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, Shiva the Destroyer, gods without number, mighty and terrible, but never a god of love. There are only two among them all whose name resembles this name, but the difference is immeasurable, and marks the uniqueness and transcendence of the Christian revelation. Among the Greeks Eros was a god of love, but the love was that of passion or desire. Love rose no higher than the flesh. Urania was also a goddess of love, in a higher or purer sense, but it was still love in man that was thus faintly deified. It was not seen in God. Men by their searching found it not, but it has been

revealed in the face of Christ. A God of Love, of holy redeeming love. That is His essential attribute. It permeates and manifests itself in all the other attributes of His nature which are made known to us. His power, His holiness, justice, goodness, and truth are all conditioned and directed by His love. We reach the truth which wisdom could not find, but which a child can understand, when we, standing at the foot of the Cross and looking up with the eye of faith that we may learn its lesson, can say, "God is Love." It is the highest thought of God that the human mind can attain. There never can be any other revelation that can supersede it. "The Divine can never be more divine than that."¹ "Perfect things are final things," and here we have the perfect revelation of the nature of God. Our text has His love as its only theme. Its different parts present but different aspects of it.

(1) It is universal in its embrace: "God loved the world." Among the Jews in the highest reach of prophetic inspiration there were vague foreshadowings of this crowning attribute of God, but while the truth was brought near to them, they did not see it in its clearness or in its grandeur. Even to the

¹ Goethe.

goodly fellowship of the prophets, the love of God that was dimly seen was love within racial limitations. It was love with exclusions and partialities. The world-wide embrace of the love of God was a truth which had never really dawned upon them. But however nearly the vision came to the ancient prophets, it had faded into the darkness of the unknown and the distant to the Jews of the time of our Lord. To them a single Jew was of greater worth in the sight of God than all the rest of the peopled world. They thought that He was altogether such as they were themselves, and that to Him as to them the Gentiles were outcasts, devoted to destruction. In their pride they deemed themselves the peculiar favourites of Heaven. But now, in this narrow race of pride and privilege, the truth was made known in the life and death of the Son of Man, that God loved the world—and loved the world not only in its totality, but in its sinfulness, the world just as it was. This is the surprise of the revelation of Jesus. This is the “greatest thing in the world.” Men might reach the thought that God loved the good, the kind, the moral and obedient, but never that He loved the vile and sinful, never that He would “commend His love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died

for us." This glory of the love of God has always seemed too good to be true. It is always difficult for the poor and narrow hearts of men to believe it. There is no sadder proof of this than that which is supplied in the hard theologies, cramped by an iron logic, which dared to read this majestic and gracious word of the evangel of God as if it had been written, "God loved the elect world." We can understand the reverence for God's sovereign power which led truth-seeking and even tender-hearted men to minimise the blessed revelation of the love of God in Christ. We can recognise the strength of their belief in the justice of God, and the intensity of their convictions of sin and righteousness and judgment. We can even say that in these days we may have erred because we do not share in the profound and august conceptions which they held regarding these things. But all the same, we repudiate the conclusions to which they came, and pray to be delivered from the blindness which hid from them the gladdening fact that God loves the world even in its sin, and that there are no exclusions with Him. The problems of human life are tremendous, but partiality in Him would make them maddening. We can bear them when we know that there is One above them all

who knows them all from centre to circumference, who is working through them, doing His will in spite of them—a God who is both just and loving, in whom all the oppositions of this world, and all the things which we cannot reconcile, are at one. We are not able to tell how the “All-Just is the All-Loving too,” but that is the revelation made in the lifting up of the Son of Man. The redeeming grace that meets the need of man comes not from the wrath but from the love of God. We must beware lest any theory of ours, or any presentation that we make of the Atonement, should obscure this primal truth. Pardon is not bought for us from one who demands a price. Grace is not wrested from an unwilling hand. “’Tis from the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin.” It is “God in Christ” who is “reconciling the world to Himself.”

(2) It is a love of intensity. “God so loved the world.” We must emphasise that word “so” if we would read it rightly. It is no mild and gentle benevolence which is in the heart of God, no feeling of delicate compassion which might sigh over man’s misery but never endure a pang for his help. Love is ever shown in kindness, service, helpfulness. “Unselfish giving is its life.” But its strength is always measured by its sacrifices. Love that

is intense is not limited to words and deeds of kindness. It finds its joy and shows its power in sacrifice. For love's sake men and women have sacrificed much. They have borne the burden of nights of watching and the strain of weary years of anxious prayer and hope deferred. They have suffered loss and pain and shame as they clung, hoping against hope, to those whom they loved. The purity and power of their passion are marked by the greatness of their sacrifices. The love of human hearts is but a poor and pale reflexion of the love of the heart of God, but we have no other measure by which to find its strength. That love shows itself in words and works of kindness and goodness, but the might and fulness of its strength are only manifested in its sacrifice. We see it in its glory when we see the gift of God to a sinful and rebellious world. He "so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son," gave Him to the lowliness of life in the flesh and to the death of shame on Calvary. That is the revelation of the intensity of the love of God for the world. Jesus is no longer spoken of as Son of Man, the name which indicated His relation to the race He came to redeem. He is now named Son of God, because it is the relation in which He stands to God which

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is to be brought before us. It was no seraph or stranger whom God gave as His gift of love. It was His only-begotten Son, one who was to Him what no other could ever be. It was a gift unspeakable. This measure of love is all "too deep for our brief fathom line." Love without sacrifice would never have sufficed. It would not have shown the sinfulness of sin, so that men might hate it; nor would it have made plain the fulness of the grace of God, so that men might be drawn to Him by it. But in the gift of the Son all this was done. In Him everything was given that the redemption of man required. Greater love than this the world can never know.

"Let love be so
Unlimited in its self-sacrifice,
Then is the tale true and God shows complete."¹

(3) It is a gracious and holy love, for it seeks to save the perishing.

The love of God is no "imperturbable goodness of heart" which lightly esteems the fact of sin. He loves the world which is perishing under the judgment of sin, a judgment which His love directs and inspires. It is a vast and wondrous unity which we see here. There is the wrath of God, by which

¹ R. Browning.

men perish ; and the love of God, by which they may be saved. But the wrath is the wrath of love. Sin must ever be the object of His condemnation, as sinners the object of His love. Love does not imply approval or indifference to what is wrong. Rather the purer the love the more intense is its opposition to sin. In a dim and shadowy fashion we see the working of love and wrath in the hearts of men and women as they seek to save their loved ones from that which destroys them, and what we see helps us to understand something of this great mystery—God's wrath against sin, through which men perish, and His love to sinners, that leaves nothing undone to save them from it. But the mystery deepens when we remember that sin is not something outside of a man, but is the bent of his will, the attitude of his nature. For the perishing consists in the fact that men are separated from the life of God, that they are alienated from Him, and that they have forfeited the destiny for which they were made. Like the eternal life, this eternal death begins in time. But what is involved in it none can say, and may none who reads this book ever know ! Its vast and dread consummation in the world to come Jesus has outlined with a pathos and power that

shake the soul when He spoke of the "outer darkness," and "the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." It was this peril that called forth the gift of the only begotten Son from Him who "willeth not that any should perish, but that all should turn and live."

(4) The love shows its greatness in the blessing it seeks to bestow. It was not only to save from perishing but to give eternal life that the gift of the love of God was given. The repetition of the closing phrase in verses 15 and 16 makes it sound like the refrain of a song in which is expressed the graciousness of the Divine Love. Eternal life in its blessedness is as far beyond our comprehension as is the misery of eternal death. It begins here amid the limitations of flesh and time; but it is a life which neither time nor death can change. Its essential principle is loving communion with God, the harmony of mind and heart with Him. It was revealed in the life of the Son of God when He became flesh and dwelt among us. Eternal life consists in being made like Christ. We are to become partakers of the Divine nature. Love can have no higher end than this. The love of God aims at nothing but the highest blessedness—union and communion with Himself.

(5) The wisdom of the love of God shows

itself in the simplicity of the means by which the eternal life is imparted. It is not given for money or for price. It is not a reward of obedience, of service, or of sacrifice. It is not a prize which is won by penance or pilgrimage. It is a free gift to all who believe. As all men need it, it is offered to all, and may be theirs by means which each can exercise. Therefore it comes to them by faith. But we must not for a moment imagine that this is an arbitrary condition, or that eternal life could have been found in any other way. Good works cannot merit it, for they may not be the instinctive movement of the soul. Knowledge cannot find it, for knowledge may leave the will rebellious. Obedience cannot secure it, for it may be the service of fear or slavery. Eternal life is not a reward ; it is a condition of the soul ; it is a present blessing, arising out of certain spiritual relations between the man and God. Faith is the response of the soul to the revelation of the love of God. It is the "seeing" of "Him who is invisible." There is no other way by which men can enter into the light and love of God than by believing that that love and light are true, and by trusting the whole life to them. Rebellion is ended when the love of God is accepted. Fear is cast out when it is believed. As the

light of the sun fills the room into which it is allowed to enter, driving away all the noisome things which love the darkness, so the love of God irradiates the heart which receives it, makes it a temple for its indwelling. Gratitude, delight in the will of God, and the longing to please Him, spring up in the soul with the vision of the love of God, and what is that vision but faith? It is the personal recognition and acceptance by the individual mind and heart of the love of God.

The love of the world has become the love of the individual. The universality of the object of love is made definite and personal. The world-relation to the love of God is replaced by a personal relation to it. The word "whosoever" gives the right to each believing soul to say, "He loved me." When that is seen and said, "old things have passed away ; all things have become new." Eternal life is begun.

XV

THE PROOF OF THE LOVE OF
GOD. JESUS CAME, NOT FOR
JUDGMENT BUT SALVATION;
YET JUDGMENT IS INEVIT-
ABLE

“He did not come to judge the world ; He did not come to blame ;

He did not only come to seek ; it was to save He came ;
And when we call Him Saviour, we call Him by His name.”

DORA GREENWELL.

“The jewel that we find, we stoop and take it,
Because we see it. But what we do not see
We tread upon and never think of it.”

Measure for Measure.

“The highest life in Christ to which man comes is in the line of man’s true humanity. There is no transportation to a foreign clime. There is the quickening and fulfilling of what is by his very essence. The fullest Christian life is simply the fullest life. To enter into it is therefore nowise strange. The wonder and unnaturalness is that any man should live outside of it, and so in all his life should never be himself.”

PHILLIPS BROOKS, *Light of the World.*

“Do I find love so full in my nature, God’s ultimate gift,
That I doubt His own love can compete with it?

Here the parts shift?

Here the creature surpass the Creator,—the end what
Began?

Would I fain in my impotent weakness do all for this man,
And dare doubt He alone shall not help him who yet
alone can?”

R. BROWNING, *Saul.*

CHAPTER XV

THE PROOF OF THE LOVE OF GOD

THERE was a widespread expectation among the Jews that when the Messiah came He would come for judgment. Judgment was to be the prelude to the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom. The great and terrible Day of the Lord was associated with His appearing. But its sentences and severities, as they thought, were to be visited upon the Gentiles, while they themselves would enter into all the joy and felicity of the Kingdom of the Messiah. The preaching of John the Baptist agreed with this expectation of judgment, though he had sought to correct the current notion that it was only to be feared by the Gentiles. The judgment was for the children of Abraham as well. He exhorted them to "flee from the wrath to come." The axe was lying at the root of the trees. The sifting fan was in the hand of the Coming One. The chaff, and every tree which did

not bear good fruit, were to be cast into the fire. But apart from this Jewish expectation, it is an instinctive fear that lies deep in the hearts of men, that when God comes near to the world it must be for judgment. Adam hid himself among the trees when he "heard the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." Isaiah cries, "Woe is me ! for I am undone ; for I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Let it be felt that God has come near, let it be known that He has sent His Son into the world, and at once the thought is quickened that it must be for judgment. It is to correct this universal fear that it is said, "For God sent not His Son to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Something of this assurance we believe was given to Nicodemus. He, like other Jews, required to have corrected the preoccupation of his mind which associated judgment with the coming of the Messiah. The imperfect and one-sided presentation of the work of the Messiah in the preaching of John the Baptist had also to be modified and completed by the emphatic declaration of what had not been seen or said by him. John had not fully realised the distinctive feature of the mission of Him whose way he was to

prepare. He thought and spake of Him as a Judge, not as a Saviour. He had proclaimed the coming of Wrath, not the coming of Mercy. It may be that it was because Jesus did not act in accordance with his preaching that the doubt was born in his mind which was expressed in the question of his disciples, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" The doubt of the forerunner of Jesus is an emphatic testimony to the strength of the expectation of judgment in connection with the coming of the Messiah. He was perplexed at the absence of the threatened "wrath." He saw not the axe, or the fan, or the fire, and for lack of these things doubted whether Jesus was his Lord. Most strange and significant it is to think that this was a cause of uncertainty in him and in others. A Messiah of Judgment would have been accepted without hesitation. The Messiah of Love and Mercy was questioned, doubted, and crucified. It shows us how close in the minds of men is the connection between the idea of judgment and the near presence of God. It is Nemesis whose leaden feet we hear behind us and whose iron hands we fear. We expect an accusing voice to say, "What hast thou done?" or "What doest thou here?" There is a voice within us

which is at once "Index, Judex, Vindex," and we say it is the voice of God. This linking of the thought of God's nearness with judgment is a witness, if a witness is required, that the gospel of the redeeming love and grace of God is not a creation or imagination of the heart of man. The Wrath of God, the Final Judgment, the human mind can picture; hell can be set before us so convincingly that it seems a reality; but apart from revelation how poor and weak are the efforts of the imaginations of men to show forth His Salvation, to picture His Love, to set before us the joys of heaven. The *Inferno* is more realistic than the *Paradiso*; *Paradise Lost* is more moving than *Paradise Regained*. In art and literature the representations of judgment, wrath, and hell are more lifelike than those of grace and glory. They accord more truly with the instincts and expectations of the souls of men. In setting forth the grace and mercy of God, the artist seems to move in a world "not realised." "These things are not after the manner of men, O Lord God." Even in preaching, it is much easier to denounce the sins of men and to proclaim the terrors of the Law than it is to declare the grace of pardon and the fulness of redeeming Love. There are preachers who

can make us hear the thunderings of Sinai, who speak with a weak and stammering tongue when they would persuade us to believe the gospel. The striking fact that pictures of judgment are realistic, while pictures of grace and glory are idealistic, is an unconscious witness to the heavenly origin of the gospel blessings. The heart of man is not at home in them. They are not things "on the earth," and therefore he cannot know them. They are heavenly things which must be revealed, and not only revealed but emphasised. The expectations of the heart of man have to be contradicted. The Son of God has not been sent to judge. He has come that He might save. God is better than men think. His thoughts are higher and more merciful than men have imagined. The abiding and sufficient proof of that is found in the fact that He sent His Son not to judge but to save. This is the assurance of God to meet the fearful conviction that abides in the hearts of men. Salvation, not judgment, is His desire and will. The character and work of the Son are intended to remove the dread of the self-condemning hearts of sinful men. "Judgment is His strange work." Mercy is His delight. It is as if He saw that the fear of judgment had to be removed before the purpose of love

could be recognised and accepted. "One of the most beautiful pictures in the whole range of ancient poetry is when the hero of Troy stretches out his arms to embrace his infant son, before he moves to the field of battle. The child shrinks from him in fear, 'scared by the dazzling helm and nodding crest,' and the tenderness of the father's heart comes out with a touch of nature that makes us feel it beating across three thousand years—

'He hastened to relieve the child,
The glittering terrors from his brows unbound,
And placed the gleaming helmet on the ground—
Then kissed the child,"¹

That is but an earthly illustration of the tender mercy of our God, who laid aside the terrors of His wrath, and sent His Son in all the gentleness and love of infinite grace and pity, not to judge, but that the world through Him might be saved.

This is the primary and essential purpose for which the Son was sent forth. The sin of man is not overlooked, but it is not the object of judgment but of pity. Through the coming of the Son we know that "He willeth not that any should perish." The saving purpose is now emphasised as the revealing purpose had been emphasised before in verses

¹ Dr. John Ker, *Sermons*, First Series, p. 242.

13-16. The same truths are expressed in both passages, but the saving purpose of God in the mission of the Son now receives new emphasis.

There is an unexpected change in the form of expression in this verse. It is not said that God sent the Son to save, but "that the world through Him might be saved." Salvation is not accomplished by the coming of the Son, it is only made a possibility. Men must perish if He had not come, but they *may* be saved because He has come. The redeeming and gracious purpose of God cannot be accomplished apart from the faith or consent of those who are perishing. It is a spiritual relation which is involved in salvation, and it must be the free and willing choice of man. No one can be saved who is not willing to be saved. We are not compelled to yield to the mercy of God; men are not driven into the kingdom of life and peace. Salvation itself, regarded as consisting in a hearty and loyal reconciliation with God, makes it imperative that there should be a true and spiritual agreement with Him on the part of man. The purpose of God in sending forth the Son, that the world through Him might be saved, cannot be accomplished independently of the will of man acting through faith in Him. Material gifts

like the light of the sun or the rain from heaven come upon the just and the unjust without distinction, upon the good and evil, without reference to moral conditions, but the blessings of eternal life can only be possessed by those who in heart and conscience are truly reconciled to Him, and have through faith accepted God's mercy in the way in which it has been offered. Faith is not an arbitrary condition of salvation ; it is essential to its possession. There is no other way in which the soul of man can enter into those loving relations with Him out of which eternal life arises. Therefore the gracious will of God waits on the trust of man. His saving purpose provides the possibility of salvation. Without the assent and consent of the sinful soul it cannot become a fact of experience.

But while salvation is the primary and essential aim of the love of God in the sending forth of the Son, there is a judgment which necessarily flows from it. It is true that judgment has been committed unto the Son of Man ; it is He who shall judge the world, but the time of that judgment is not yet. Not yet

“The ending of the days and ways of man,
The shaking of the sources of the sea.”

Not yet the Son of Man in His glory on the Great White Throne. “ ‘Now’ is the day of salvation ” ; “ now ” is the dispensation of grace. But in this period of grace there is a judgment which works inevitably wherever the Son of God is known. The word “ judge ” is capable of two meanings. In its simplest significance it implies a discernment, a recognition of the distinction between that which is good and that which is evil. In its narrower significance it implies the passing of a sentence in accordance with the distinction which it has recognised. It is the first significance which we find in the use of the word here. The distinction between right and wrong, between faith and unbelief, is recognised, is brought to light, but the sentence is not pronounced. It is only the state of the soul which is revealed, but that carries with it a prophetic indication of what the sentence will be.

In accordance with this view of the meaning of the words, God sent not forth His Son to pronounce sentence upon the world, but to offer the gracious possibility of salvation to everyone. “ He that believeth is not judged.” The purpose of God has been fulfilled in him, he is saved. Judgment has nothing to do with him, though there has been in his case a revelation of the

condition of the soul. "He that believeth not is judged" (has been judged) "already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten Son of God." The perfect tenses employed in reference to the case of the unbeliever indicate not only the fact that the state of the soul has been discerned, but that it remains in the state which is so discerned. The unbelief is the indication of the moral condition. He is judged because he has not believed. He remains judged because he remains in unbelief. The judgment must remain as long as the unbelief. Here the word comes very near to its signification of passing sentence. But the sentence is not yet pronounced.

The condition which is revealed by the coming of the Son of God is not created by Him. He only brings to light a state of mind and heart which exists "already." It is now discerned, and named, through the negative action of unbelief. The sentence meantime is deferred. It will be pronounced in the day when the Son of Man exercises the judgment which has been committed unto Him.

This is the inevitable and necessary process of discernment and separation which is connected with the coming of the Son of God.

There are consequences produced by it which affect those who do not believe, even though their unbelief is not definite or the result of the conscious decision of the will. It is something which they have not done which is their fault and penalty. The response of faith, or the absence of it, is not so much the act of the will as the act of the nature. The answer of the soul to the revelation of the loving purpose of God is spontaneous. It is in accordance with the moral condition. We believe, because we find in Christ the things which meet and satisfy the needs and desires of the heart. There is an affinity of soul with Him which welcomes Him as the eye welcomes the light. He is at once "all our salvation and all our desire." The soul has found its life and peace in finding Him. Unbelief, on the other hand, is also a response of the nature to the revelation of the grace of God. Unconsciously to themselves, those who do not believe are saying, "There is no beauty that we should desire Him." Their preference for other things is their judgment. The unmusical reveal the absence of "music in the soul" when they take no pleasure in a "grave sweet melody." The glory of the sunset never quickens adoration in the heart of a man who is colour

blind. The loveliness of art is little better than painted canvas to those who are in-artistic. They are judged because they do not take pleasure in these things. Their lack of interest is their sentence, their penalty. They act as they do because of what they are. But there is one important distinction which separates unbelief from these imperfect analogies. The absence of the power to appreciate the loveliness of the world or the beauty of the creations of art may spring from defects of nature, and may not have any blame attached to it. Moral conditions have their influence on our power of vision of these things, but their influence is not so paramount as it is in relation to faith. The love of the beauty of the world may co-exist with immorality, though we believe it will be imperfect, but the love of Christ cannot. The soul which does not respond to Him has its treasure elsewhere. That is its judgment.

“The name of the only-begotten Son of God” is a phrase which includes everything that is known about Christ. It stands for all that He is and for all that He has done and said. Men cannot know Him by His name, know Him as He is, without being tested and tried, discerned and judged. When we

realise all that the name includes, we do not wonder at the dreadful consequence involved in refusing to believe or in not believing in Him. He reveals a God of love desiring to bestow eternal life on sinful perishing men ; a God who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son to a life of lowliness in the flesh and to a death of shame on Calvary, where the innocent suffered for the guilty, the sinless for the sinful, to bear away their sins. What can be the condition of the soul when all this is seen or known without awakening a glad response? The splendour of the revelation of the glory of God in the creation of the world becomes dim before the glory that excelleth it in the revelation of redeeming love in the mission of the Son of God. That soul has judged itself which remains unmoved, rebellious at this marvellous revelation of the heart of God. To be indifferent when this is known is to judge oneself "unworthy of eternal life." The determination is reached by a process of "instinctive election." The man has chosen his side, and goes to "his own place."

XVI

THE JUDGMENT OF LIGHT

"The all-beholding sun yet shines,
It is the garish, broad, and piercing day ;
Loud, light, suspicious, full of eyes and ears,
And every little corner, nook, and hole
Is penetrated with the insolent light.
Come darkness !"

SHELLEY, *The Cenci*.

"Not quite so sunk that moments
Sure though seldom are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise us if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way
To its triumph or undoing."

R. BROWNING.

" 'What think you of Christ,' friend? When all's done and
said,
Like you this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but will you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can?"

R. BROWNING.

"There are but three steps from earth to heaven, or, if you
will, from earth to hell . . . acts, habits, character."

BISHOP BUTLER.

"He who lives in the shade never sees his own shadow ; he
who lives in the sunshine does.—T. T. LYNCH.

"The sin that practice burns into the blood,
And not the one dark hour that brings remorse,
Doth brand us after of what fold we be."

"The great thing in the world is not so much where we
stand, as in what direction we are going."—O. W. HOLMES.

CHAPTER XVI

THE JUDGMENT OF LIGHT

THERE is an apparent contradiction in the assertion that God sent not His Son to judge the world, and yet that judgment is an inevitable consequence of His coming. The conflicting statement might have been avoided by a simple and emphatic declaration, without any other addition, that He had come in order that "the world through Him might be saved." That was the glorious truth, but it was not all the truth. It was not enough to assert in as strong a form as possible what was the essential purpose of His mission to the world. His presence in it was a fact of such magnitude, an event of such importance, that it had influences far beyond its primary and chief intention. It affects not only those who are saved by Him, but those who are not saved. The light of His revelation comes as near to those who reject it as to those who accept it. It works as decisively on those

who welcome it as on those who shrink from it. Since He has come, the world can never be what it was before. He has created new conditions of life, set before men new opportunities, forced upon them new matters for decision. Indirectly but necessarily judgment issues from His coming. The judgment is not judicial, final, irrevocable. It is one that reveals and intensifies moral qualities and conditions which are already in existence. The seeming contradiction to which we have referred is removed when once the peculiar character of the judgment is explained. "This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil."

(1) It is to be noticed that this is not a new form of judgment which was introduced by the coming of Jesus into the world. Men have been judged by it since the beginning of moral life. In the ancient world, the Persians developed so full and distinctly the idea of conflict between light and darkness as emblematic of the strife between good and evil, that it became the basis not only of their morality but of their theology. The principle of judgment in accordance with knowledge is contained in the pregnant word of the Prophet

Amos to Israel: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3²). The principle is universal and works instinctively. Men are always judged by the coming into their lives of that which has the moral quality of light, and, as Paul says, "Whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5¹³). There is "a disclosure beneath the surface," an illumination and confirmation of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It is this familiar and universal judgment which applies itself to those who do not believe in Jesus. The rejection of the light which He revealed is only an illustration, but the highest illustration, of a law which has been at work since the beginning.

(2) For in the revelation of Jesus it is not only light, but *the light*, which has come into the world. In comparison with the fulness and intensity of His revelation, all "the lights of life" which men possessed before were dim and flickering. They were "broken lights" issuing as from "smoke and flame," without "clear shining." They were lights of the night rather than of the day, starlight rather than sunlight. It is not the dim radiance of the Daystar, but the effulgent glory of the Day, which has dawned upon the darkened earth in the coming of Jesus. He identifies

Himself with all the marvellous significance of light. It is a new world in which we live, since we can say, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." Of this world, as of the world that is to come, it may be said, "The glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." We know as never before the fulness of redeeming love that is in the heart of God. We have become aware of the depths of mercy and the richness of grace and goodness which are in Him. It is His will to save the lost and to give them the blessing of eternal life. The revelation of infinite love and pity in Christ has lightened the darksome ways of time and made life more hopeful and beautiful. But the light works not only in blessing, but in judgment. If it is true that where there is no light there is no shadow, it is equally true that with the growing intensity of light there is also a deepening intensity of shadow. With the increase of knowledge there is the possibility of an increase of sorrow. There has come to the lives of men an added seriousness as well as an added joy in the revelation of Jesus Christ. We see new cause to say, "How awful goodness is!" The new seriousness of life does not spring from any threats which were announced by Jesus, or from any thunders as

from Mount Sinai which might find a place in His gospel. The intensified severity draws its strictness from the multiplication of mercy. It is not wrath which creates judgment, it is love. It is not darkness which makes life terrible, it is light. It is not ignorance which condemns, it is knowledge. Since there is in Christ the greatest amount of manifestation, there is also the severest judgment issuing from it. The standard is raised with the light; the judgment is increased with the knowledge.

This principle runs through the whole of the Gospel. It is expressed most clearly in the saying, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." It is illustrated in the woes which were pronounced against Chorazin and Bethsaida. It was their judgment that light had come to them, greater light than that which had been given to the cities of the Plain or to Tyre and Sidon, and that they had rejected it. Therefore it would be more tolerable for the ancient cities. Their wickedness may have been as great as that of the cities in which Jesus had taught, but it was not done in the light which He had revealed.

In the principle thus laid down we see both the goodness and severity of God. The less

the light, the gentler is the judgment; the greater the light, the judgment is the more severe. Men are not condemned simply for the sins which they have done. The condemnation is measured by the light which they misused or abused. "For where there is no law, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4¹⁵). In the deepest moral sense, the line in *Comus* is true, "'Tis only daylight that makes the sin." Those who have lived in savage lands will not be judged like those who have had around them the light of the Gospel of Christ. "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes" (Luke 12^{47,48}). For the sinners of a darkened land or time there will always be the prevailing prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." For those who sin wilfully, sin in the light, there is severity—a severity that terrifies—"a darkness more dread than night." If, as the Arab proverb says, "there is darkness under the lamp," how great is that darkness!

(3) This great law has proved itself in the experience of mankind. It is a commonplace of moral observation that sins of ignorance

have not the same power of deterioration as sins of knowledge on those who commit them, and that, as a general rule, the sins of the flesh are less destructive of spiritual sensibility than those of the mind or the will. In popular estimation, the publicans and harlots were greater sinners than the Scribes and Pharisees, but those whom the world condemned listened to the teaching of the Saviour and pressed into the Kingdom of God, while those whom men admired, opposed and crucified Him. The social outcasts were degraded, but not hardened; the Scribes and Pharisees were hardened, but not degraded. Their action was the revelation and confirmation of their state. They not only rejected the opportunity of receiving infinite good, but increased their own moral deterioration. Their sentence realised itself in their condition. Their character became their destiny. In this way Schiller's great saying, "The history of the world is the judgment of the world," receives a new significance and a wider application. Under the working of this principle we may say that the moral character or condition of men and nations is their judgment.

(4) But why should it be so? It is not enough to say, "because their deeds were evil." It is not evil deeds alone which bring

the penalty. It is evil that is revealed as evil, and persisted in against better knowledge. The light is hated because the evil is preferred. When the light of Christ falls upon the souls of men, there is a disclosure both of new possibilities of life and of the significance of moral actions. Men no longer darkly question what they are, or vaguely think of what they may be. They know that they are the object of the love and grace of God, that they were created by Him and for Him. It is within their knowledge that they are to be His children, sharing in His life, enjoying His gracious fellowship, finding their joy and satisfaction in free and gladsome obedience. The sins of the past are no hindrance to their entrance into this happy state, for these are all forgiven through the redemption which has been provided. But the blessings of love and life are never forced upon the acceptance of men. They are presented with infinite tenderness and attractiveness as possibilities which men may accept or refuse. The alternative is as clearly and distinctly marked as a choice between good and evil, between light and darkness. The decision which is made is no longer confused by the perplexities which arise out of ignorance, nor is it deprived of its moral

significance by unconsciousness of the motives which are acting through it. The light of Christ dispelled the mists which hid the frontier lines and obscured the issues. He was the "Word of God, quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It was not by His teaching alone that He acted thus. There was something in His character, in His very presence, which affected men as never before. The stern denunciations of John the Baptist could be borne. His voice was as the thunder. The moral issues he presented were familiar. The sins he condemned were open and palpable. But the ministry of Jesus was like the light—quiet, pervasive, penetrating, from which nothing could be hid. Men saw themselves as they were. The "light was divided from the darkness." This is the permanent effect of the coming of Christ. It has produced the Christian conditions and issues of life. Faith is the outcome of attraction to Him ; unbelief, of repulsion from Him. The decision which men make is more than an act of the will. It is a decision of the moral nature. It issues from the condition of the man in the innermost depths of his

being. The capacity of faith is weakened or strengthened by the character of the moral life. Habits of thought and feeling affect it. The prevailing tendency or bias of life is confirmed by repeated action. The little decisions culminate in the great decision, and result in a moral character which is in accordance with them. "For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." It is the action of men in relation to light which determines their action in relation to Christ. The conditions out of which unbelief or faith arise are obscure, but there is one great principle which explains how they are created. Faith is the response of the soul which welcomes light however painful its effect may be; unbelief is the response of the soul which shrinks from its searching and condemning influence. Obedience to light, however faint, is a preparation for the obedience of faith when the light of Christ comes to the soul. That does not mean that there are no failures, falls, shortcomings, sins, in the life that receives Christ. These may be and are sad facts in the experience of Christian people, but the sin

is known as sin, is a cause of shame and grief, is not loved and preferred for itself, but is quickly forsaken in an endeavour after new obedience.¹ Disobedience to the light, however dimly it may shine, persistent choice of evil, with little or no regret or grief because of it, creates a condition of soul to which light is unwelcome and the appeal of Christ is undesirable. Ultimately the answer of faith or unbelief depends upon the sympathy or antipathy of the moral nature of men towards the kind of things which Christ offers and reveals. And the nature has been created by the persistent habit of action in relation to good and evil. There is no power of man which has such possibilities of hurtfulness as that of shutting out the light. No act is so swift or so simple as the closing of the eyes of the body, and we blind ourselves as easily in the vision of the soul. The splendid line of Tennyson—

“We needs must love the highest when we see it,”

is not true. The “Highest” was “seen and hated” and crucified. The light is only sweet to those who desire it. So the publicans and

¹ “He who has even once subdued the flesh in favour of the spirit can never again return with joy to carnal things.”—John O. Hobbes, *The School for Saints*.

harlots listened to the words of Jesus, and pressed into His Kingdom, because sin had never ceased to be sin to them, and they had never lost the longing to be delivered from it. The Scribes and Pharisees opposed and rejected Him because they had destroyed the capacity of faith through chronic hypocrisy and complacent self-righteousness, and would not own as sin what He revealed to be sin. The Kingdom of God, with its grace and purity and peace, appealed to the hearts of those who felt themselves to be sinners. There was no beauty in it that the self-righteous could desire. Therefore Jesus said again, "For judgment I am come into this world, that those which see not might see, and that those that see might be made blind." Some of the Pharisees which heard Him said, "Are we blind also?" and Jesus said unto them, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth."

The condemnation of unbelief is not capricious. Unbelief is a choice or decision in agreement with the habitual bias of moral inclination. Those who have no interest in the things of Christ exclude themselves from the blessings He has brought within their reach. His Kingdom does not appeal to them, awakens no glad welcome as they hear of it,

stirs no feeling of desire to belong to it. In a most emphatic and essential way they are "out of it." They prefer the darkness, and go to their own place. Thus we may say, though it is a fearful thing to say, that even hell may be the last mercy of God to sinners who have rejected Christ. As there is no greater torment to the man who suffers from disease of the eyes than the unbroken and unshaded brilliancy of light, and no greater relief than seclusion from it, so there can be no greater misery for the soul which is diseased by sin than the purity and peace of heaven (it would be "Never more in hell than when in heaven"¹), and no greater mercy than the darkness and blackness of that condition from which the light of the glory of God is withdrawn.

The warning is terrible, but it is needed. Even before men come to the knowledge of Christ, they are preparing themselves for faith or unbelief by their action in relation to the light which they possess. And when the knowledge of Christ comes, and men delay their decision, they are setting themselves on the way which may at last lead them to reject Him. Their delay is an illustration of that "great vice of human nature—slackness about moral good." As a

¹ Milton, *Paradise Regained*.

rule there is something in their lives which they wish to keep from the light of Christ. They come not to the light because of it. And all unconsciously the judgment verifies itself in them. They "sow an act and reap a habit; they sow a habit and reap a destiny."¹ We never know when the soul has lost its capacity of faith. We dare not say of any one that he is "without hope"; but we know, from the indubitable facts of life and from the words of Him who in the fulness of His compassion died that men might be saved, that it is a dread possibility. On the other hand, the "honest doubter" will never be kept from Christ by his doubts, if only he maintains his honesty. Let him act up to the light which he has, never shrinking from its painful and strenuous guidance, never ceasing to seek for more, and he will come at last to the Light of Life, and yield his heart to Him who has been leading him to Himself. For "he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

¹ "It is a terrible thing this modern view of destiny, which makes it not some malign outside power doing spiteful things to us, but the slow, inevitable working out of our natures."
—M. W. Goodwin, *Four Roads to Paradise*.

XVII
NICODEMUS COMING TO THE
LIGHT

“There are
Powers that tend the soul,
To help it from the death that cannot die.”

“Then open, O my soul ! thy portals wide ;
Open, and let thy Lord and Ruler come ;
Open, if haply He may here abide,
And make within thee His eternal home.
Open thy gates, thy halls, thine inmost shrine,
Till all be flooded with the Light divine.”

SIR LEWIS MORRIS, *Waking*.

CHAPTER XVII

NICODEMUS COMING TO THE LIGHT

THERE is a peculiar interest attaching to the references to Nicodemus in the later parts of this Gospel (John 7⁵⁰⁻⁵², 19^{39,40}). We often desire to know what effect was produced on those outside the immediate circle of personal followers who came into contact with Jesus. Most of them come but once into the light of the Gospel story. They pass away again without any indication as to how they were influenced by Him. For instance, how precious would any later references have been which told us something more of the rich young ruler who went away sorrowfully from the presence of Jesus. We wonder if he ever came to a better mind, and lost his sorrow in the joy of finding the true riches. Was he one of those who were "possessors of lands or houses, who sold them and laid the price at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4³⁴)? We cannot tell. It is only Nico-

demus who reappears in the history. The singularity of this fact, as well as the significance of what is said about him, give a special value to the additional knowledge which we have about him.

At what stage of the narrative in the earlier part of the Gospel he went away from Jesus we do not know. Most likely all that is recorded was spoken in his hearing, though not in the form in which we have it. The narrative is condensed; the truths have been elaborated. They are set down not so much in their reference to Nicodemus as in their universal application. But he went away, as we believe, with such thoughts and warnings in his memory as are set forth in the passage from verses 12-21 of chapter iii. His predominant feeling would still be one of surprise. We do not think that there was any offence in his mind or any feeling of revulsion from Jesus in his heart. The personal intimacy which he had enjoyed had given him an inclination towards Jesus which nothing could alter. The teacher whom he had sought out was widely different from what he had expected. He had heard many things which were beyond his comprehension; but since he had looked into His eyes and listened to His voice, he could only think of Him

with reverence or respect. The words to which he had listened were full of significance because they were *His* words. Strange and revolutionary as the teaching had appeared, the accent of authority in the tones of Jesus, the magnetism of His personality, gave it an unexpected weight, and made it worthy of further study and inquiry. Nicodemus would report the result of the interview to his friends if such were associated with him in his mission. He may have had not a little private discussion with them as to the things which he had heard. Joseph of Arimathæa may have been one of these, perhaps the only one who found cause to think more sympathetically of Jesus from what was said by Nicodemus. We also naturally expect that in the days which followed the interview Nicodemus would read the Old Testament with fresh eagerness, seeking to discover if the Kingdom of God of which Jesus had spoken was indeed to be found in outline and suggestion there, and if he himself, with the rest of the rulers, had gone astray and misled the people. We believe it was information regarding the Kingdom which he had sought or hoped to receive when he came to Jesus, and that of itself marks him out as one who was seeking light. And the light had been given, such as never shone on

sea or land. But was it the true light—light from heaven? That would be the persistent question that he tried to answer in the days that followed. We cannot tell what were his thoughts during the interval in which he is hidden from us, but they must have been favourable to Jesus, or he would not have spoken for Him as he did in the Sanhedrin (John 7⁵⁰⁻⁵²). It is reckoned that about two years and six months lie between the time of his visit and the day when he uttered his remonstrance against the illegal violence of his colleagues. He does not say much, but what he does say reveals the direction in which he had been moving. He was advancing towards the light, though his progress may have been slow. It is not easy for old men to change the views which they have held for a lifetime, and especially for old men who have been engaged in teaching them. The process of growth in such cases is marked not so much by abrupt change and definite declarations, as by an increasing sympathy with the new truths, a recognition that they are deserving of study, and a tendency to deprecate any rash or harsh treatment of those who advocate them. We must also remember that even those who did openly identify themselves with Jesus maintained their former relations with

the organised worship of the nation. If Nicodemus accepted the teaching of Jesus, if he sought and found the new life from above, the inward change did not involve any outward break in his life. If he was, as we believe, a sincere Pharisee, the new life would blend itself so quietly with the old that he himself might be unconscious of the change. He would have a new sense of the nearness and goodness of God, a new feeling of humility, an unknown peace of heart and mind, and a growing reverence for Jesus. Faith in its first movements is not always conscious of itself. Besides, the link which bound the confessed disciples to Jesus at the beginning was one of friendship, admiration, and expectancy, rather than of faith in Him as Son of God and Messiah. Though the progress of Nicodemus had been slow, it was perhaps all that could be expected in the circumstances. Evidently he had such an interest in Jesus that he could not be silent when the challenge was made, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" (John 7⁴⁸).

The rulers had been growing in antipathy while he had been growing in sympathy with Jesus. They had made up their minds that He must be destroyed. Some of them, or of the rabble whom they stirred up, may have

been in the crowd when He said, "Why go ye about to kill Me?" (John 7¹⁹). Their purpose was at least known in the city, for "some of Jerusalem said, Is this not He whom they seek to kill?" (John 7²⁵). But secret assassination, if such was their plan, had failed. The open process of law was set in motion; the order was given for His arrest. But when the Sanhedrin met there was no prisoner to try or to condemn. The officers were empty-handed. When they were asked, "Why have ye not brought Him?" they replied, "Never man spake like this man." Even these rough fellows had been charmed by His speech. A power had touched them which made them forget their warrant and the dread of the great court whose servants they were. Perhaps Nicodemus smiled as he heard their excuse. Well did he know how true it was that never man spake like this man! In the annoyance of baffled rage, the rulers, forgetful of their dignity, contemptuously demanded from their servants, "Are ye also deceived? Which of the rulers or of the Pharisees have believed on Him?"¹

¹ In the Sinaitic Palimpsest the verses read: "For who of the chief men or of the Pharisees has believed on Him? Only this mob, which knoweth not the law." The words "are accursed" are omitted.

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This sweeping assertion sounded like a challenge to Nicodemus. He might have let it pass unnoticed. There was no direct necessity why he should say anything. The question had not been addressed to him. But his interest in Jesus was such that he could not let it pass. Though he was not bold enough to say, "One Pharisee has believed in Him," he felt compelled to say something on His behalf. He intervened with the mild and general remonstrance, "Doth our law judge any man unless it first hear from him and know what he doeth?" It may be that he would have said the same on behalf of any other victim of unjust passion and illegal haste. In every assembly there are usually one or two who keep their heads in times of excitement and violence, and recognise the danger of violent proposals. Nicodemus may have been a man of that character, but we believe it was his feeling of friendship for Jesus which prompted him to speak as he did in answer to the contemptuous challenge of his associates. His fellow-councillors interpreted his words in that way. The slightest sign of consideration for the man whom they hated was proof positive to them that the speaker was His friend. They said, "Art thou also of Galilee?" The fact that he left

the question unanswered inclines us to regard his slight movement of protection as a tentative confession of faith.

But there is more to be said than that. We cannot understand why the mild remonstrance of Nicodemus should have enraged the rulers, until we relate it with the advice they gave to him—"search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." Taken as they stand in our versions, the words do not appear to have the slightest connection with the objection which Nicodemus had interjected. Besides, they make the rulers appear to be ignorant of the facts of their national history, while they are directing Nicodemus to search and look into its record. It is inconceivable that these men should have forgotten that prophets like Elijah, Jonah, Hosea, and Nahum had arisen out of Galilee. Then the matter which agitated the council was not a question as to whether Jesus was a prophet or not. It was the much graver question as to whether He was *the* Prophet, that is, the Messiah. It was the sayings and questions of the people which were creating the agitation and trouble of the Sanhedrin. Some said, "This is truly the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." Others again objected, "Surely the Christ comes not from Galilee?"

And this again was met by the reply of those who believed on Him, "When the Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this man doeth?" (John 7²⁶⁻⁴²). "The Christ" and "the Prophet" are really synonymous. There would have been no anger or hostility in the council if the people had only regarded Jesus as one of the prophetic order. It was their acceptance of Jesus as the Prophet, or Messiah, that aroused their inflexible and violent fanaticism. It was because they suspected Nicodemus as being of the same growingly popular belief that made them answer him as they did. His gentle objection, as they thought, showed amazing ignorance. What had the law to do with one who was plainly an impostor? Was it not written of the Messiah that "He cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" (John 7⁴²). But Jesus came from Galilee. Was not that enough? What need had they to examine Him by any process of law? In surprise that Nicodemus should be ignorant of that evident and conclusive fact, they bade him "search and look, for out of Galilee (the) Prophet ariseth not." This interpretation¹ not

¹ Carr, *Expositor*, Sixth Series, vol. viii. p. 219. See also Note M.

only makes the whole passage relevant, but it gives point to the taunt, "Art thou also of Galilee?" It meant, "Are you one of those who know not the law, who look upon this evident impostor from Nazareth as the Prophet? Do you actually believe in Him in spite of this notorious disqualification?" It is these facts which give significance to the interference of Nicodemus. It was in face of this apparently impregnable objection to the truth of the claim of Jesus that he had ventured to utter his question, "Doth our law judge any man unless it hear from him and know what he doeth?" It was not a new objection which he heard for the first time in the council chamber. He had known of it before, for it was the stock argument which was constantly repeated in the discussions that were going on amongst the people (John 7⁴²). To the mind of Nicodemus that had not settled the matter. Jesus had created in him such a conviction of greatness and truth, that, in spite of its seeming cogency, he could demand a fair trial for Him from those who thought that the falseness of His claims was beyond dispute. In these conditions his interference was a notable proof of his interest in Jesus. His incipient faith triumphed not only over the difficulty of the Galilean origin

of Jesus, but over his constitutional timidity and his natural unwillingness to oppose his excited and fanatical colleagues. It meant much that he should feel himself compelled to speak on behalf of Jesus in such a gathering and in such a connection. The rulers had come to a very decided opinion as to the absurdity of the claim and the danger of the influence of Jesus. They saw that if He was not checked the political and religious ideals which they cherished were doomed. The slightest indication of sympathy with this preposterous claimant of Messianic dignity was a proof of treachery to the nation and of friendship with Jesus. It meant that the man who hesitated to act with them had gone far on the way of admitting the truth of the claim. And they were right. As "they went every man to his own home" that day, Nicodemus would be left alone, or Joseph of Arimathæa would be the only one who walked beside him. He suffered for the sake of Jesus, and having done so, his friendship, if not his faith, would be strengthened. For it is one of the strange facts of spiritual life that no one can say a word for Jesus without finding his own heart warming to Him. From that day Nicodemus may have thought of himself as a friend of Jesus. The very opposition of his associates had brought

him a step nearer to the light. He might not take the name of a disciple openly, but he was one in secret.

Once more there is an interval of hidden life and experience. Other six months pass away. The hatred of the rulers grew in intensity and virulence. Plans were made, treachery was plotted against Jesus. With the help of Judas Iscariot, He was arrested. After a hurried trial, in which everything had been settled beforehand, He was rushed to Pilate's judgment bar as one who had been condemned to die. The Roman governor could not withstand the pressure of the fierce demand of the rulers, backed as it was by the violence of the people. He delivered Jesus to their will, and the saddest of all processions went by the Sorrowful Way to Calvary, where He was crucified. What had happened to Nicodemus in the interval? We believe that as there was a growth of hate in the minds of the rulers, there was also a growth of faith and affection in him. For one thing, he had evidently entered into close fellowship with his fellow-councillor, and it was their common interest in Jesus which brought them together. It is said of Joseph of Arimathæa that he "had not consented to the counsel and deed" of the rest (Luke 23⁵¹). Though the same is not

recorded of Nicodemus, we can say with certainty that he also had refused consent. It would be an act of intolerable meanness, an inconsistency which is inconceivable, that he should give his voice or vote for the unjust sentence by which Jesus was condemned, and then take part with Joseph in burying his victim. We may be sure that Joseph would not have cared for such an assistant in his work of love. We cannot think that he who had before remonstrated with his colleagues on account of their violence towards Jesus, was carried away with it when it swept triumphantly to its goal. We believe that both Nicodemus and Joseph refused consent to the cruel and hateful sentence by which Jesus was destroyed. It was as a friend of Jesus, as a sincere mourner for His fate, that he went with Joseph to perform the last duties of love, the one encouraging the other till both were bold ; for

“As one lamp lights another nor grows less,
So nobleness enkindleth nobleness.”

What can we not say of the brave act of these two secret friends, when the followers who had openly identified themselves with Jesus were in flight or hiding ? We must not suppose that their position gave them immunity from danger,

rather it increased the significance of their action, and exposed them to the wrath of men who would have no scruple in treating them as harshly as they had treated Jesus. Friendship for Jesus among the common people might easily be passed over, but friendship among the members of the Sanhedrin, sympathy for the disturber of Israel in those who were associated with themselves, was a serious matter, and may have engaged their attention immediately after the death of Jesus.¹ It was as men who knew the risks that they were running that they took the body from the cross and laid it with the spices in the tomb. Their souls had been in the furnace in the dark days when the death of Jesus was planned and carried to its issue. The last elements of the dross of fear had been purged away. They were secret disciples no longer. They had come to the light. Openly, caring not who saw them, they united in the last duty of love, the one giving the rich spices and the other the new tomb "wherein never man was yet laid." Little would they say to one another as they performed the act of loving reverence. They would be burdened

¹ Tradition, not without some likelihood, says that Nicodemus was baptized by Peter and John, and was deprived of his office and banished from Jerusalem.—Hastings, *Bible Dictionary*, art. "Nicodemus."

both by sorrow and shame : sorrow for Him, that His life should end so sadly ; shame for themselves, that they had not done more to show their affection for Him and openly identified themselves with Him in the days of His life. One wonders if there came into the mind of Nicodemus that strange word which he had heard about the lifting up of the Son of Man. Was he filled with adoration and expectancy as he helped to take the body from the cross ? Did faith become conscious then ? We cannot tell, but we believe that this man, who was at first a timid and perplexed inquirer, passed into the light and peace of steadfast faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour.

NOTES

NOTE A, PAGE 9.

John 2^{23,24}: “Many believed in His name” (ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα). . . . “But Jesus did not commit” (ἐπίστευεν) “Himself unto them.”

It looks as if there was a play on the word *πίστευω* in this passage. It may be brought out by the translation, “Many confessed their trust in Him, but He did not trust Himself to them,” or, as Godet puts it, “He had no faith in their faith.” They were ready to follow Him, but He was not ready to yield Himself to them so as to become their Leader.

The phrase, *πιστεύειν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα*, “believe in the Name,” is peculiar to the Johannine writings. It is found in two other places in the Fourth Gospel, and twice in the First Epistle. In these instances (John 1¹², 3¹⁸, 1 John 3²³, 5¹³) it indicates a genuine Christian faith—*e.g.* “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1¹²). It is remarkable that this significant phrase is used in John 2²³, where the faith which it describes was regarded by our Lord as insufficient and unreliable. Perhaps its use here may be accounted for by the fact that the faith of the “many” who “believed in His name” was correct in its form and object—*i.e.* Jesus was thought of as the Messiah. It was, however, lacking in spiritual quality. The Messiahship of Jesus

was in accordance with their own ideas, and not according to His. The spiritual content of the "Name" was not recognised. Their faith was founded on the "signs which He did," not on the character of His Message or Mission.

The forms which are used in the Fourth Gospel to express faith deserve special study. "John never uses the noun πίστις, 'belief,' 'faith,' 'trust,' but he compensates for this by an abundant use of the verb" (Abbott, *Johannine Vocabulary*). The verbal forms are not a little perplexing. Πιστεύω is used

(a) Absolutely	in 41 instances	41
(b) With dative of object simply	„ 12 „	} 20
(c) „ „ „ and article	„ 7 „	
(d) „ „ „ and ἐν	„ 1 instance (3 ¹⁵)	} 37
(e) „ acc. „ simply	„ 1 „ (2 ²⁴)	
(f) „ „ „ with εἰς	„ 28 instances	} 37
(g) With acc. of object with εἰς and article	„ 8 „	
98 „ in all.		

On John 2²³ Abbott quotes Origen as saying, "We must trust to Him rather than to His Name, lest while doing mighty works in His Name we should hear His reproachful words, uttered when men boasted about His Name." Abbott also says, "Holding fast to Him as distinct from His Name belongs to those who have perfect insight." "Origen's conclusion appears to be sound and in harmony with Johannine thought and language, namely, that to trust to the Name of Jesus implies a lower kind of trust, a profession of belief in baptism." "According to this, 'believed in the Name' might mean in effect that he (the man) became a Christian convert and was baptized" (*Vocabulary*, 1484, 1486).

Abbott also remarks on "the inability of classical Greek to represent the Semitic traditions about trusting in God. Πιστεύειν εἰς is never thus used in the LXX." "Also π. is never followed by a preposition in classical Greek" (*Vocabulary*, 1470). The construction in classical

Greek is with the dative, and has the sense of "crediting," "believing,"—the faith resting on the word rather than on the person.

On the construction *πιστεύειν εἰς*, which is peculiar to the New Testament, the following remarks may be quoted: "Christ demanded a new thing. He asked for a surrender of much more than the ears to His lessons or the body to His regulations. His claim touched the soul, and the N.T. Scriptures are full of this new idea, which was expressed by the word *faith*. Men were to believe in Jesus. We have called this conception *new*, for the Jew had no conception of such a frame of soul as it implied. His thought was always to *know* and to *do*. . . . The heathen world were so far strangers to the disposition which Jesus asked of all who became His disciples, that Christianity was compelled . . . to adopt a new phraseology, to find new words wherewith to express this new condition of discipleship. . . . *Πιστεύειν εἰς* is a novel mode of expression invented to describe the sort of allegiance which Christians owed to their Lord and Saviour" (Prof. Lumby, *Expositor*, First Series, vol. v. pp. 155, 156).

Another aspect of the importance of John's use of *πιστεύω* is indicated by Prof. Sanday. He says: "I have long suspected that one of the reasons for the apparent want of progressive development in the Fourth Gospel has been the ambiguity of the word 'believe.' We are told from the first that the disciples and others 'believed,' and it is natural enough that we should take the word in the full and complete sense of complete conversion and acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. But there can be little doubt that to do so is to read into the word a great deal more than the writer intended. We do not make sufficient allowance for the extreme simplicity of his vocabulary. He has but one word to denote all the different stages of belief. We must attend

closely to the context if we would see when he means the first dawning of belief and when he means full conviction" (*The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 161).

NOTE B, PAGE 10.

John 2²⁵: "**And needed not**" (more literally, "and because He needed not") "**that any should testify of man**" (περὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), "**for He knew what was in man**" (ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ).

"Of man" and "in man" may be interpreted generically or individually. The Authorised and Revised Versions adopt the first, but in our opinion the individual reference is to be preferred: "He needed not that any should testify of the (particular) man (with whom He dealt), for He knew what was in the man." The use of *ἄνθρωπος*, "a man," in John 3¹, may indicate that the treatment which Nicodemus received is an illustration of the knowledge of men which Jesus possessed.

NOTE C, PAGE 12.

John 3¹: "**But**" or "**Now**" (δὲ) "**there was a man of the Pharisees.**"

Opinion is divided as to whether δὲ is adversative or continuative. The question really depends on the view which is taken of Nicodemus. Did the evangelist regard him as one of the "many" to whose faith Jesus did not trust Himself, or is he brought forward as an exception, as one to whom Jesus did freely open His mind? The answer to that question again depends on the view which is taken of the length of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Did it end at verse 10 or 12? If so, then Nicodemus "is dismissed curtly as one who, con-

ceited and confident about his own wisdom, has nevertheless shown himself quite incapable of understanding even elementary spiritual truth" (Garvie, *Expositor*, Sixth Series, vol. vi. p. 205). If, however, the view is taken that the truths which are recorded by the evangelist in verses 13-21 are the development of ideas which were mentioned in the course of the conversation, Nicodemus was one in whose case Jesus broke the rule of reserve which characterised His ministry in Jerusalem. This is the view which we have adopted. We agree with Bishop Moule, who says: "To this reserved man He has no reserves." Godet is of opinion that "Nicodemus is at once an example [one of the "many"] and an exception: an example, since miracles have been the occasion of his faith; an exception, since the manner in which Jesus treats him proves that He does not despair of the normal development of his faith" (*Commentary on St. John's Gospel, in loco*). It is, however, quite possible that δὲ is continuative, and simply introduces Nicodemus as an illustration of the way in which Jesus "knew what was in man." See Note B.

NOTE D, PAGE 17.

"The Pharisees were divided into seven classes."

"Among the many figures whom our Lord passed in the streets of Jerusalem and elsewhere, He must often have met those to whom the by-name was given of Shechemite Pharisees, who kept the law only for interest, as Shechem submitted to circumcision simply to obtain Dinah; or the Tumbling Pharisee, who, to appear humble before men, always hung his head and shuffled his feet on the ground, so that he constantly stumbled; or the Bleeding Pharisee, who, to keep himself from seeing a woman, walked with his eyes shut, and so often bled his head against posts; or the Mortar Pharisee, with a cap like a mortar over his

eyes to shut out all that might shock his pure nature ; or the What-more-can-I-do Pharisee, who claimed to have kept the whole law, and wished to know something new, that he might do it also ; or the Pharisee from Fear, who kept the law only for fear of judgment to come. But He would also see Pharisees like Hillel . . . who was perhaps still alive when Christ was born" (Geikie, *Life and Words of Christ*, vol. i. p. 12). Edersheim, after mentioning the first six classes, refers to the last as "the Pharisee from Love" (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. i. p. 312).

NOTE E, PAGE 45.

John 3³: "Except a man be born from above."

The verb *γεννάω* is generally used of men begetting children or of children being begotten. It is used "peculiarly in the Gospel and the First Epistle of John, of God conferring upon men the nature and disposition of sons, imparting to them eternal life" (Wilke and Grimm, *Clavis Novi Testamenti*). Accordingly, it would be more correct to read: "Except a man be begotten from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God," and "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be begotten?" The only advantage which would be gained by this translation is that it emphasises the inner character of the experience out of which the new life issues.

**Ανωθεν.* There is much diversity of opinion as to how this word is to be translated. The choice lies between (1) "again," "anew," "denuo" (Vulgate), or (2) "from above," "desursum." Against the first there is the objection that it makes our Lord simply affirm the necessity of a new birth, without in any way indicating what its character is to be. Much stress is laid by those who favour the translation "again" or "anew" on the fact that it was in this sense that Nicodemus understood the word. But

all strength is taken from that argument when it is recognised that Nicodemus had misunderstood it, for verse 5 is given as an explanation of verse 3. Nicodemus is a poor guide as to the meaning of the Master's words. It was not a new beginning of life on which our Lord was insisting, but on *the beginning of a new life*. The word *ἀνωθεν* describes its character and source. In the margin of the Revised Version the translation "from above" is marked as an alternative, but the value of the note is found when we remember that it expresses the opinion of the majority of the Revisers.

In the Fourth Gospel the word *ἀνωθεν* is used in four other places: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above" (3⁷); "He that cometh from above is above all" (3³¹); "Thou couldst have no power against Me except it were given thee from above" (19¹¹); "The coat was woven *from the top* throughout" (19²³). These instances are not conclusive. We can only say that the balance of usage is on the side of "from above." Abbott adopts this translation in his *Vocabulary*, 2573, and adds that Chrysostom and Origen are in favour of it. See also Calmes, *L'Évangile selon S. Jean*; and Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 219.

NOTE F, PAGE 45.

John 3³: "The Kingdom of God."

It is only here and in verse 5 that this phrase is found in this Gospel. Its use, however, is a point of contact between the Fourth Evangelist and the Synoptists. He was familiar with the phrase which occurs so frequently in their writings. We notice that the phrase is found much more frequently in the Synoptics than in the rest of the N.T. Evidently its use had become somewhat rare. Possibly at the time when John wrote it was inexpedient to make

frequent use of a phrase which was susceptible of a political signification. John prefers to express the blessings of the gospel in a more abstract or personal way as "Life," or "Eternal Life." It may be assumed that our Lord took the phrase "Kingdom of God" from the Book of Daniel (Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 136). In the O.T. and Jewish literature it always means God's "kingly rule" or "sovereignty" (*Ibid.* p. 94). In its essential meaning it is the rule of God in the life of man. But it often has the suggestion of the Kingdom as an entity—a spiritual organisation. It is at once "Reign and Realm." "It emanates from heaven, and heaven is the seat of the authority which obtains within it. Its law is the will of God. It exists among men in proportion as they live in conformity with the Divine will, and realise in personal and social life the purposes of God's holy love. The Kingdom of God on earth is therefore the domain in which God's holy will is done in and among men" (Stevens, *The Theology of the New Testament*, p. 28). "The historical aim of Christ's work was the founding of a Kingdom of God, which includes not only the spiritual salvation of individuals, but a new order of society, the result of the action of the spiritual forces set in motion through Christ" (Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, p. 39). "The true place of the idea of the Kingdom of God in theology is as a teleological conception. It defines the aim and purpose of God in creation and redemption" (*Ibid.* p. 404). "The idea has an eschatological reference" (*Ibid.* p. 405).

The Kingdom is not to be identified with the Church. "The Kingdom of God is a wider conception than that of the Church" (*Ibid.* p. 409). "It represents a unity which no type of polity can create or express, and which varied and even dissimilar polities need not break up or dissolve. It is visible, yet invisible; all its springs, motives, ends, the souls in which it lives, the God who reigns through the conscience, and the conscience in which God reigns,

are all unseen ; but all its evidences and fruits, the evils it cures, the good it does, the beneficences it works, are seen. . . . If we seek its nearest analogy, we shall find it in the invisible Church of the Reformers ; if we seek its deepest contrast, where is this likelier to be found than in the canonised offices of bodies sacerdotal and ecclesiastical ?" (Fairbairn, *Christ and Modern Theology*, p. 519).

We reject the view which regards the phrase "Kingdom of God" as one which embraces "the whole contents of the teaching of Jesus" (Wendt, *Teaching of Jesus*, vol. i. p. 173), "under this category all may be ranged" (Bruce, *The Monthly Interpreter*, vol. i. p. 32).

We agree with the opinion that "there are elements in Christ's teaching that cannot legitimately be brought under the category of the Kingdom of God" (Kidd, *Morality and Religion*, p. 337).

NOTE G, PAGE 74.

John 3⁵: "Water and Spirit."

The first thing to be noted about this phrase is that it is an explanation of *ἀνωθεν*, "from above," in verse 3. The difficulty of interpretation lies in the linking of "water" with "Spirit." Prof. Lake, *Expository Times*, April 1904, and Prof. Wendt, in his *Teaching of Jesus*, vol. i. p. 91, note, propose to delete the word. Wendt says: "I here repeat my conjecture expressed in *L. J.* i. p. 261, that the mention of water along with Spirit . . . did not belong to the original record of the discourse, but is an addition by the evangelist in redacting the source of the Johannine sayings, because throughout the following words reference is made only to the operation of the Spirit, for the purpose of generating the new life, whilst the co-operation of water, mentioned in verse 5, remains unexplained, and without reference in

the connection of the passage. . . . For if the designation of water . . . arises out of the original form of the discourse, we must explain it in regard to the inner moral purification. . . . But apparently the redacting evangelist has added the idea of water in verse 5, with direct reference to the Christian baptism of water." We would incline to agree with this opinion if we were convinced that it was Christian baptism to which reference is made. The interpretation which we have given provides a sufficient explanation of the word. The suggestion of Mr. Neil, (*Figurative Language in the Bible*) that "water and Spirit" are to be taken as an instance of hendiadys and interpreted as meaning "spiritual water" does not commend itself to us. It fails to comply with the first requirement of an explanation. It does not explain anything.

We agree with the view that "there is no reference to the water of Christian baptism in the words, and to see it is to be led astray by sound and out of metaphor to manufacture a miracle" (Maclaren, *Sermon on The Four-fold Symbols of the Spirit*).

NOTE H, PAGE 105.

John 3⁸: "The Spirit breathes where He wills, and thou hearest His voice, but knowest not whence He comes or whither He goes; so is every one that has been born of the Spirit."

The reasons which have led to the adoption of the above translation are as follows:—

(1) Πνεῦμα occurs five times in the immediate context. In four instances it is translated "Spirit" in the Authorised Version, and once "wind." But surely if N.T. translation is to proceed on rational lines, the word must have the same sense throughout the passage, verses 3-8? It

is nothing less than exegetical lawlessness to give it the meaning of "wind" and "Spirit" at the beginning and end of *the same sentence*.

(2) Πνεῦμα occurs in the N.T. in all about three hundred and seventy times. In no other place is it translated "wind." The only place where a possible exception may be found is in Heb. 1⁷. In their Commentaries on this passage, Rendall and Bruce read the sentence as, "He maketh His angels winds." But it is to be noted that the doubtful instance occurs in a quotation from the O.T. Apart from this instance, πνεῦμα in the N.T. is reserved as the name of "Spirit" or "spirit," except in cases where it is strictly qualified, as "breath of the mouth" (2 Thess. 2⁸), or "breath of life" (Rev. 11¹¹). The proper word for "wind" is ἄνεμος, which occurs thirty-one times in the N.T. and the Fourth Evangelist was acquainted with it (John 6¹⁸).

(3) It is almost certain that the conversation was carried on in Aramaic. If so, we must remember that every translation is also an interpretation, and we are at liberty to conclude that by using πνεῦμα instead of ἄνεμος, the evangelist indicated that he understood our Lord to refer to "Spirit" and not to "wind." In this we have a first-hand interpretation of the passage.

(4) The traditional interpretation or translation of the word compels those who adopt it to make remarkable admissions. Godet, for instance (*Commentary, St. John's Gospel*, vol. ii. p. 54), says: "The application of the comparison in the second part of the verse is not quite accurately expressed. It would have been necessary to say, 'Thus take place the changes in every one who is born,' but it is not in the genius of the Greek language to square the comparison and the application so symmetrically." A translation which requires to minimise the genius of the most flexible and expressive of languages cannot be quite "accurately expressed." The explanation

is fatal to it. If our Lord had intended to say, "Thus take place the changes in every one who is born of the Spirit," no doubt "the genius of the Greek language" would have been found sufficiently flexible to allow of such symmetry of application.

(5) The common interpretation of the verse is supposed to indicate the manner in which the new birth is brought about, but the language of the evangelist distinctly excludes any reference to that. The perfect participle (ὁ γεγεννημένος) in the phrase, "so is every one that has been born of the Spirit," can only indicate *the product of the new birth*—the man after he has been born of the Spirit. If the reference had been to the manner or act by which the new birth was accomplished, the tense would have been the aorist—ὁ γεννήθεις (cf. οἱ . . . ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν, John 1¹³). The manner of the birth is described, as far as it is possible to do so, in verse 5: "Except a man be born" (γεννήθῃ) "of water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." There, the aorist is appropriately used. By the use of the perfect tense, the evangelist indicated a comparison between the Spirit and the Spirit-born, and it is that comparison which we have elaborated. The freshness and fulness of the truth of the passage when thus interpreted are noteworthy, and more than compensate for any loss which may be experienced in giving up the traditional interpretation. The teaching of the verse when thus interpreted fulfils the thought of Athanasius quoted as one that might seem "too daring" by Prof. E. Caird (*The Evolution of Theology*, vol. ii. p. 366): "He [Christ] became man, that we might be made gods."

It is, however, objected (1) that "the difficulties which beset this passage are not removed but indeed increased by translating πνεῦμα as 'Spirit.' As Meyer reminds us, the Holy Spirit never 'blows'" (Brown, *The Expository Times*, vol. iv. p. 287). But the dictum of Meyer is not

so destructive as it looks to the proposal to translate it $\piνέω$ by "breathe." In Wilke and Grimm, *Clavis Novi Testamenti*, we find under $\piνέω$, "from Homer downwards, to breathe; to blow." In classical authors (see Liddell and Scott) $\piνέω$ is sometimes used of flowers giving forth their fragrance. This may not be admitted as decisive in a question of N.T. interpretation, but at least it suggests a wider meaning and application of the word than is suggested by the few instances in which it is found in the N.T. It occurs only six times. Its derivative $\piνοή$ is used of "breath" (Acts 17²⁵), and its compound, $ἐκπνέω$, "to breathe out," is found in Mark 15³⁷ and Luke 23⁴⁶. From these instances it is evident that no violence is done to $\piνέω$ when translated "breathe" in expressing the action of the Holy Spirit. The slight modification of $\piνέω$ is merely the legitimate adaptation of the general idea contained in it, to the particular subject—the Holy Spirit—of whom it is predicated. A much more serious liberty is taken by those who translate $\piνεῦμα$ as "wind." More reasonable is it to slightly and legitimately modify $\piνέω$, which occurs only six times in the N.T., than to change entirely the meaning of $\piνεῦμα$, which occurs as "Spirit," "spirit," or "breath" three hundred and seventy times. To make $\piνεῦμα$ "wind" because of $\piνέω$ is a clear case of the tail wagging the dog.

(2) Another objection relates to the particle of comparison, $οὕτως$. It indicates a comparison of manner and not of substance or character. But it is exactly a comparison of manner of acting that it indicates in verse 8. The Spirit's manner of acting is one of absolute freedom. His movements are such that they may be recognised; they are also hidden in their origin and end. It is in regard to these characteristics of the Spirit that there is a likeness in the man who has been born of the Spirit. In his life also there is freedom, recognisability, and mystery.

(3) It is also asked how can we hear the "voice" of the Spirit, when *φωνή* means articulate voice? The retort might be made, "How can we hear the voice of the wind, since *φωνή* means articulate voice?" There is really no difficulty here. No one is misled or confused by the familiar words, "Hear what the Spirit saith," or "The Holy Spirit said." We interpret these phrases in the line of spiritual analogy, and when we do the same in the instance before us, the word becomes equally simple and impressive.

The difficulties which may attach to the translation which we have adopted are as nothing compared with those which belong to the traditional interpretation. If it is granted (and it is not easy to see how it is to be denied) that a word which occurs at the beginning and end of the same sentence must be translated in the same way, the conclusion is inevitable. The translation which we have adopted must be accepted, or expositors are face to face with the difficulty of interpreting the passage as it would appear in this unfamiliar guise: "Except a man be born of water and wind, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the wind is wind. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but knowest not whence it comes or whither it goes; so is every one that is born of the wind."

It may be added that the translation which we advocate is given in the margin of the Revised Version (and is, therefore, that of the majority of the Revisers). To that authority the names of Origen, Augustine, Wiclif, have to be added. In the Vulgate the verse reads: "Spiritus ubi vult spirat; et vocem ejus audis, sed nescis unde veniat, aut quo vadat; sic est omnis qui natus est ex Spiritu." Maurice also adopts the translation, but works it round to the old interpretation that it refers to the manner in which the new birth is brought about

(*The Gospel according to St. John*, p. 64). So also does Watkins in *Commentary for Schools, St. John*. The translation and interpretation are interestingly wrought out by Erskine of Linlathen in *The Brazen Serpent*, pp. 5-8. A fine exposition of the comparison is also to be found in the *British Weekly*, of 2nd August, 1900, entitled *The Life of the Spirit-Born*, to which we are indebted for the quotation from Vaughan, page 114.

The reasons for and against the adopted translation and interpretation are given more fully in articles by the present writer in the *Expository Times*, vol. iv. pp. 161, 369 (1892-93), and Messrs. T. & T. Clark are thanked for permission to use them in the above statement.

NOTE I, PAGE 172.

John 3¹³: "The Son of Man, who is in heaven."

The phrase "who is in heaven" is omitted in MSS. \aleph B L and by Westcott and Hort. It is accepted by Tischendorf, Scrivener, and Nestle. In the *Sinaitic Palimpsest* the phrase is given as "the Son of Man, who is from heaven." The omission and alteration of the words are easily accounted for. They presented a difficulty when read as if they had been spoken by our Lord. It is not easy to believe that they are an addition to the original text. When they are taken as the words of the evangelist, their explanation is simple, and their place in the narrative is justified. There is no need to venture on the dubious line of interpretation which gives "heaven" a local sense at the beginning and a spiritual sense at the end of the verse (Godet).

NOTE J, PAGE 189.

John 3¹⁴.

Abbott has an interesting note on the Brazen Serpent. He says: "The meaning of this allusion, so obscure to us, would be comparatively easy to a Jew familiar with the doctrine of the serpent in the wilderness set forth by Philo, Barnabas, and the Targums: 'As the first serpent and the first Adam brought sin, so the second Serpent and the second Adam must take away sin. The first serpent was the passion for pleasure and self; the second, the passion for kindness and the love of others. Thus interpreted, these difficult words teach one of the deepest of truths, that man will never be really reformed on lines of mere law or on lines of mere asceticism. Never will a human being be reshaped from without as by a sculptor's hand. He must grow up from within, his heart going up and his desires going up with it, out of himself into a new man, a second Adam, the Man from heaven,' " (*Johannine Vocabulary*, 1493).

Erskine of Linlathen's little book on *The Brazen Serpent* is worth studying for the fulness with which the suggestiveness of this emblem is wrought out.

NOTE K, PAGE 199.

John 3¹⁵: "Whosoever believeth in Him"

(*πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ*).

This is the only instance in this Gospel of the construction of πιστεύω with ἐν (see Note A). It is the reading adopted by Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, and Nestle, and the Revisers. The Textus Receptus and **Σ** read εἰς αὐτόν. Other MSS. have the variant ἐπ' αὐτόν. But the variation is of little or no importance, as the preposition ἐν, equally with εἰς and ἐπὶ, indicates the peculiar character of Christian faith. The previous words of the verse "might not perish" are found in MSS. **A** and **Δ**, but not in **Σ B L**. They are omitted by Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, and Nestle.

NOTE L, PAGE 203.

John 3¹⁶: "God so loved the world that" (ὥστε) "He gave," etc.

There is a slight peculiarity in this wonderful verse which should be noticed. ὥστε in the N.T. introduces the consecutive clause. It is commonly followed by the indicative or infinitive. "The indicative properly expresses the actual result produced . . . the infinitive, the result which the action of the principal verb is . . . calculated to produce." John 3¹⁶ and Gal. 2¹³ "are the only two clear instances in the N.T. of ὥστε with the indicative so closely joined to what precedes as to constitute a subordinate clause" (Burton, *The Moods and Tenses of the New Testament*, 234, 235, 236).

NOTE M, PAGE 259.

John 7⁵²: "Out of Galilee (the) Prophet ariseth not."

This statement is usually translated as, "Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." The historical error which the statement contains is regarded as an illustration of ignorance or the blinding influence of passion on the part of the rulers. The only grammatical objection to the translation we have adopted is the fact that the word "Prophet" is without the article. But the article is often omitted before proper names, words that may be used as such, and words which specify objects of which there is only one in existence.

If Χριστός were to be put in place of προφήτης in this passage, there would be no difficulty. It was one form of the Messianic hope that the Christ would be a prophet like unto Moses (Deut. 18¹⁵, Acts 3²²). Some of the people were saying (verse 40), "Of a truth this is the Prophet."

The reply of others (verse 41), "What, does the Christ come out of Galilee?" exactly expresses the thought of the rulers when they said, "Out of Galilee (the) Prophet ariseth not." The above is a brief statement of the arguments advanced by Carr, *Expositor*, Sixth Series, vol. viii. pp. 219-26.

The chief objections to this line of argument are the contentions of Lightfoot, that "the Jews in St. John's Gospel, conceive '*the Christ*' and '*the Prophet*' as two different persons," and that their identification is a Christian and not a Jewish conception (*Expositor*, Fourth Series, vol. i. pp. 84, 85). There is no N.T. scholar from whom one differs with such unwillingness and hesitancy as Lightfoot, but it is not easy to see how St. Stephen (Acts 3²²) and St. Peter (Acts 7³⁷) could have identified "the Christ" with "the prophet" at such an early stage in the Christian interpretation of Messianic prophecy, if the distinction between them had been generally recognised. If the Jews thought that "*the Christ*" and "*the prophet*" were "two different persons," the audiences addressed by St. Stephen and St. Peter would not have understood that they were claiming that Jesus was the Messiah. Besides, it is only by identifying "the Christ" and "the prophet" in John 7⁴⁰⁻⁵² that the difficulty is avoided of attributing the grossest ignorance to the rulers, or that any relevancy can be found in their objection, "Out of Galilee (the) Prophet ariseth not."

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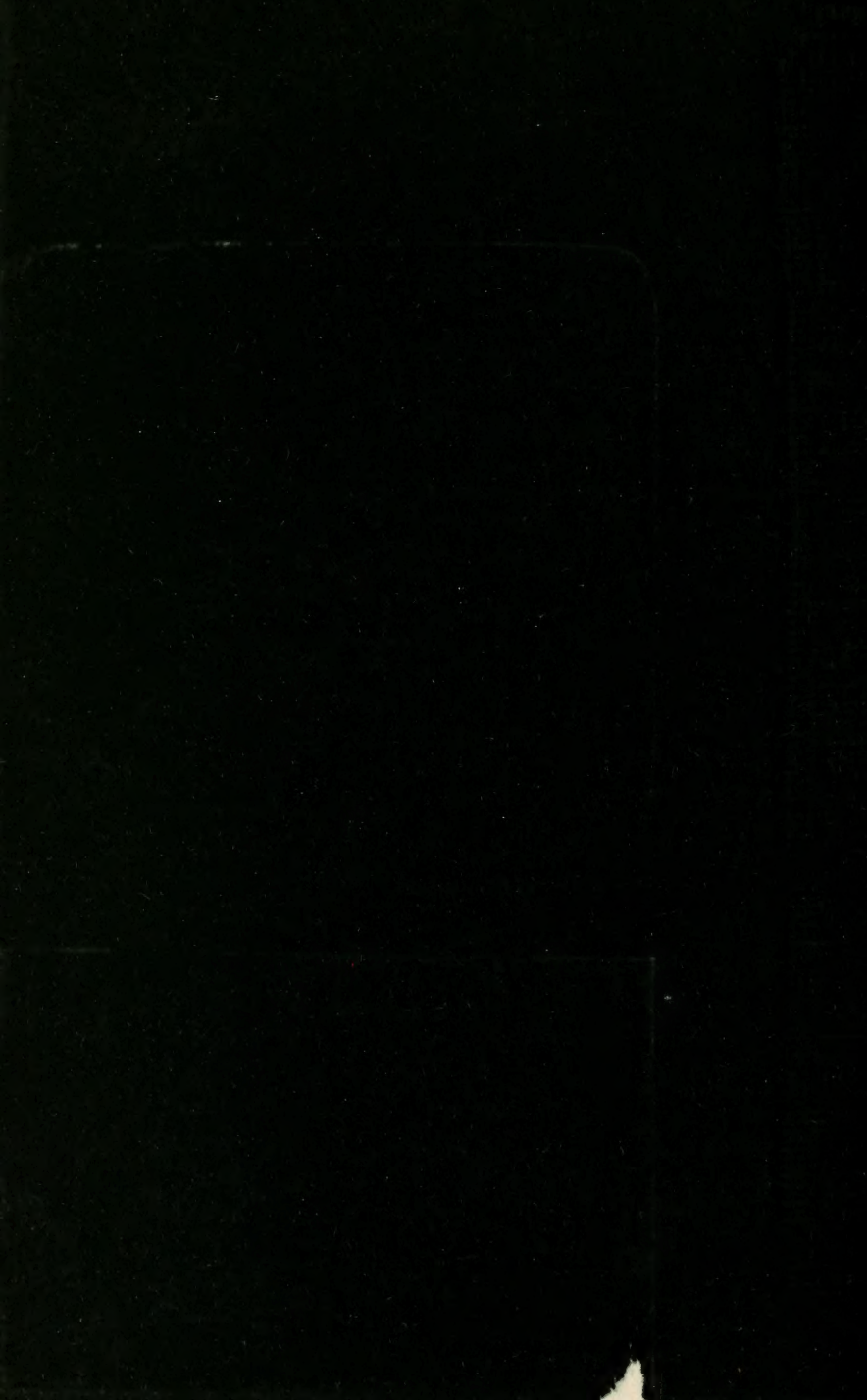
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